New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
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1944 PRODUCTIONS

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"The Perfect Marriage"

Play by Samson Raphaelson; staged by Mr. Raphaelson; settings by Oliver Smith. Presented by Cheryl Crawford at the Barrymore Theatre, October 26, 1944.

THE CAST

Dale Williams	Victor Jory
Jenny Williams	Miriam Hopkins
Rosa	Evelyn Davis
Mabel Manning	Helen Flint
Addison Manning	James Todd
Gloria Endicott	Martha Sleeper
Helen Williams	Joyce Van Patten

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 27, 1944

In 'The Perfect Marriage' They Talk About Love for Two Days

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I DON'T suppose one could find two more proficient and more attractive players for the roles of Dale and Jenny Williams than Victor Jory and Miriam Hopkins. Last night, at the Barrymore, Miss Hopkins and Mr. Jory were so real, so resourceful, at talking out the sex problems that had accumulated during nine years of marriage that they bored the pants off me.

The play is Samson Raphaelson's "The Perfect Marriage," and it is a verbal baked alaska. First, Mr. Jory and Miss Hopkins talk themselves out of love and then they talk themselves back in again. They talk glitteringly and even sometimes brightly and it's all as sophisticated as an ad writer's caption for a $300 evening gown. The trouble with me was I didn't seem to care whether they were in love or out of it.

On their anniversary the Dale Williamses are having a cozy evening at home dancing to the radio and drinking champagne and being very loving and generous toward one another and saying "Darling" every paragraph. Pretty soon they decide they're just so damned nice they can't be in love, so they'd better get a divorce.

Two days and two acts later, having by now bared their souls in polite talk, they come to the conclusion that for nine years they've been strangers, so now they'd better stay married and get acquainted. They are going to have to hire a hall for their 20th anniversary.

Mr. Raphaelson has written and directed everything quite smoothly. There are four extra characters—a daughter, played by Joyce van Patten; a rueful but gallant divorcee who is just a playwright's dream of sophistication, played by Martha Sleeper, and a couple who haven't very much to do, impersonated by Helen Flint and James Todd. Oh, yes—and Evelyn Davis as a Negro maid. Everybody has maids in plays.

Cheryl Crawford has given "The Perfect Marriage" a production which should be termed smart. Oliver Smith's setting is smart and Miss Hopkins is smartly dressed by Valentina.

NEW YORK POST
October 27, 1944

'The Perfect Marriage' A Dull Discussion of Divorce

By WILELLA WALDORF

SAMSON RAPHAELSON has written some entertaining plays in his time, but his latest, "The Perfect Marriage," produced last night at the Barrymore Theatre, is singularly uninspired. Cheryl Crawford has given it the advantage of a good cast, an attractive setting reminiscent of "The Voice of the Turtle" and some expensive looking clothes for the ladies of the company, but it's no use. Vapid is the word for "The Perfect Marriage."

Mr. Raphaelson is deeply concerned over the plight of Dale and Jenny Williams, who find that "the magic has gone out of their marriage" on their tenth wedding anniversary. They spend the next day, a dull Sunday, discussing divorce plans in a haphazard sort of way, being gracious to each other, squabbling over a financial settlement, getting jealous, wooing their only daughter, aged nine, and demonstrating beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt that they are a profoundly shallow and uninteresting couple.

Finally, just as we were about to brace up and throw something, they decided that they had actually spent Sunday getting acquainted. All those ten years, it seems, they had been just "beautiful strangers." Whether his beatific finale had anything to do with the fact that Miriam Hopkins had taken off a good looking Valentina suit and got into a backless and partially frontless flame color evening gown, we really couldn't say and don't especially care.

No Rest for the Weary

Be it set down to the credit of Miriam Hopkins and Victor Jory that they got through the evening without going off to sleep in the middle of a sentence There was a time when we did think Mr. Jory caught forty winks on the couch, but maybe not. Both of them are far too good for this script, and, funnily enough, so is Mr. Raphaelson's direction.

The rest of the company is largely lost offstage somewhere, but young Joyce Van Patten, who was so good in "Tomorrow the World," is still a very persuasive little actress, and there's a nice bit by Evelyn Davis as Rosa, the Negro maid. Martha Sleeper has a few brief but intelligible moments as a friend who might be the other woman, but isn't, while Helen Flint and James Todd weren't around much, possibly because every time they came to call, either the host or the hostess told them to go on home.

Miss Hopkins is a definite addition to the Broadway theatrical scene, but she ought to have a spunky, more spirited role. The nearest approach to spirit in "The Perfect Marriage" is a husband-and-wife argument over who's to have that square lamp in the living room after the divorce. "You take it. I'm giving it to you." "I wouldn't think of it. It's yours." "No it isn't. You said you wanted it . . ." We've heard better dialogue at an auction.

This "can we ever recapture that first careless rapture" theme was far better handled years ago by Vincent Lawrence in a play called "Sour Grapes." There was a scene between Alice Brady and John Halliday that had the audience galvanized with excitement, while the actors sat quietly on the stage and simply talked. But what talk!

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 27, 1944

Matrimonial Humpty-Dumpty

By HOWARD BARNES

SAMSON RAPHAELSON toys with the problem of domestic happiness in his latest play, "The Perfect Marriage." His observations are both trivial and dreary. The Ethel Barrymore Theater offering has nothing of any dramatic import to say, but it stutters along for three sorry acts. Since Miriam Hopkins and Victor Jory posture all over the place, trying to make the work come to life, and Oliver Smith has designed a very fancy setting for their didoes, this Cheryl Crawford production is as pretentious as it is dull.

• • •

What Raphaelson was up to, aside from sheer garrulity, is hard to determine. He has taken a well-to-do couple after a decade of married life, split it asunder for no good reason in the world and finally has put some sort of matrimonial humpty-dumpty together again. Since his characters are never vivid and honest enough to make you care about their tiny travails and their chit-chat would make you want to run like a rabbit if you encountered them in real life, "The Perfect Marriage" is singularly trying.

• • •

A comedy on so superficial a theme as the author has concocted might have been vaguely entertaining. Unfortunately, the new play is desperately lean on humor. When Miss Hopkins is planning a campaign to make her estranged spouse jealous she merely flounces out of character without getting a chuckle for the effort. When Jory, as the obdurate husband, tries to renew an old and unfinished bit of romantic business, he is more embarrassing than entertaining. Even little Joyce Van Patten, as the daughter of the perfect marriage, who uses a family blow-off for her own selfish designs, is bowled over by a bad role.

• • •

Raphaelson deserves whatever dead vegetables are tossed around the Ethel Barrymore auditorium. On occasion he has written proficiently and glibly. He has created a wisp of a dramatic situation in the second act with the aid of a Negro maid and he has achieved an acrid touch with the husband's woeful attempt to forget his marriage in an affair. Incidentally Martha Sleeper plays the other woman with sharp emphasis—far more than you will find in the impersonations of Miss Hopkins and Jory. The set, which has living room and bedroom on stage simultaneously, might have been used to dramatic advantage. Not with "The Perfect Marriage."

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 27, 1944

'Perfect Marriage' At the Barrymore

By ROBERT GARLAND

MIRIAM HOPKINS and Victor Jory, two of my favorite on-stage characters, most certainly have themselves a time these nights in the theatre that takes Ethel Barrymore's name in vain. Co-starring in "The Perfect Marriage," a new something-or-other by Samson Raphaelson, they indulge in a love-and-hate duet, *sempre appassionata*, the like of which has not been heard since Doris Keane and Jacob Ben-Ami had it out in Eugene O'Neill's unsuccessful "Welded."

They indulge in this love-and-hate duet over and over again. I love you because I hate you in the living room. I hate you because I love you in the sleeping chamber. I love you because I hate you in the sleeping chamber. I hate you because I love you in the living room. Jenny Williams, who is Miriam Hopkins, just can't make up her mind. Dale Williams, who is Victor Jory, just can't make up his mind. And Samson Raphaelson just can't make up their minds, either.

It's a crying shame. For "The Perfect Marriage," as produced by Cheryl Crawford in a "Voice of the Turtle" sort of setting by Oliver Smith, has much to recommend it. But not enough, I fear.

Back to Beginning

To get down to facts, Dale and Jenny Williams have been married for ten, eleven, years. He is a successful (enough) business man. She is a successful (enough) editor of a woman's magazine, a sort of lady in the fog, if I may say so. Between them, they have a successful (enough) offspring whose real name is Helen, whose nickname is Cookie. A happy (enough) household, as New York City households go. But, all of a sudden, Dale and Jenny decide against it.

And for no particular reason. Celebrating their eleventh wedding anniversary by remaining quietly at home, they persuade each other that their marriage is a physical, mental and moral failure. Divorce is the sole solution. So, getting into negligee and dressing gown—anniversary gifts to one another—they begin to argue it out between them. And argue it out they do, arguing around in circles, ending just where they were in the beginning.

There're stretches when the dialogue is bright, brittle and truly Raphaelsonian. But there're other stretches when the dialogue is forced, repetitious and unRaphaelsonian.

Let's Take Stock

As "The Perfect Marriage" is practically a love-and-hate duet by Miss Hopkins and Mr. Jory, it's no more than fair to report that they make the most of it. They more than make the most of it, really. The lady, looking lovelier than ever, plays with fire and feeling. The gentleman, at his manly best, plays right back at her. Actress and actor give their all to Mr. Raphaelson. It is Mr. Raphaelson who doesn't give his all to them. He lets them down.

The supporting cast is—supporting! In the first or last analysis, they're constantly outside the story. Joyce van Patten, as their nice, but neglected, offspring, is a dear, just as she was in the original production of "Tomorrow the World." Martha Sleeper is what the playwright ordered as one Gloria Endicott, just as Helen Flint is what the playwright ordered as another Mabel Manning. Evelyn Davis has an amusing scene as the Williams' maid-of-no-work.

When you take stock of play, playwright, players, production and producer, "The Perfect Marriage" sums up as a disappointment. Or maybe I expected too much from the combination. Could be!

NEW YORK TIMES
October 27, 1944

Miriam Hopkins and Victor Jory Decide Against Divorce to End 'The Perfect Marriage'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SAMSON Raphaelson seems to be gloomily cynical about the tenth year of married life. Let the anniversary roll around, the champagne be opened, the daughter tucked in her little bed at the back of the house—and all hell can break loose for an apparently happy couple. In his latest play, "The Perfect Marriage," which Cheryl Crawford celebrated at the Barrymore last evening, Mr. Raphaelson faces the dangerous tenth year. He worries the problem of love versus friendship, stands back and looks at it, and then worries it again for a rather lengthy evening. To say that the state of marriage is this morning about where it was last night is to say no more than that the state of the theatre is about the same also. Mr. Raphaelson's new one is not his best. There is an awful lot of talk—as in the first nine years of family life.

In "The Perfect Marriage" Mr. Raphaelson has skipped very few of a playwright's file of cliches labeled Home Life, Smart. The wife is an editor of a woman's magazine—as Gertrude Lawrence was in "Lady in the Dark"—the husband is a designer of bombers. They have a fancy apartment, with two rooms visible as in "The Voice of the Turtle," the kitchen in the latter not counting as a room. They have a daughter with pigtails and the precociousness of stage children this year. When the wife has decided to leave her husband she calls up an old beau; the husband does not refer to him as a cad, but that is what he implies. At the beginning of the play, and for no apparent reason, the couple decide to get a divorce: at the end they decide they are in love, of all things, and won't.

The law courts are filled with reports of that dismal tenth year, so no doubt Mr. Raphaelson could point out a few models. The near-ending of his perfect marriage, however, seems to be carried along on a good many levels, all voluble. At the opening the couple apparently are quite content; in Scene One they decide to celebrate at home and not go out dancing or whatever. In Scene Two they decide they are tired of one another, and in Scene Three they will get a divorce. Some of the time they are serious, some of the time they are exchanging bright lines, some of the time they are groping wordily along under the Pagliacci influence. "The Perfect Marriage" is neither a witty piece such as Mr. Coward would have written it, nor a serious study, although there are apparently designs on both.

Miriam Hopkins has the role of the wife and in the playing alternates in style between Miss Lawrence, Tallulah Bankhead and Miriam Hopkins. In those moments when she can be herself she brings some fire and enthusiasm to the stage, but those moments do not make up the greater length of the play. Victor Jory is very nice as the husband. He is quiet, sincere and does not get thrown off balance. Martha Sleeper has the third important role; she is the other woman for that time Mr. Raphaelson decides there must be one, and she is good. Joyce Van Patten is the child, and gives a fair enough performance, and the other three characters are played by Helen Flint, James Todd and—as the usual comedy maid—Evelyn Davis. Mr. Raphaelson directed; the setting is a good one by Oliver Smith.

NEW YORK SUN
October 27, 1944

'The Perfect Marriage' Is a Plodding Comedy, Characters Lacking Reality

By WARD MOREHOUSE

SAMSON Raphaelson, who has been known to have a facile way with dialogue, dissects matrimony at the ten-year mark in the comedy called "The Perfect Marriage," which Cheryl Crawford placed last evening upon the stage of the Barrymore. This new play is a curiously hollow one, plodding its way through three tiresome and digressive acts.

Mr. Raphaelson's principal characters are Jenny and Dale Williams, married for a decade. They suddenly decide, on their anniversary, that love is dead, that the magic has gone from their marriage. They talk of divorce and bring on a lawyer. But they change their minds. They fight. They talk and talk and talk—and decide to get really acquainted with each other.

"The Perfect Marriage" wanders and rambles. It is lacking in real emotion and feeling. After you've lived through three acts with Jenny and Dale it seems like a considerable part of their ten years and long before they've decided to make a go of it you've ceased to care.

Mr. Raphaelson's dialogue is occasionally sharp and sententious, but there is an unreality about his characters and it's my impression that this study of matrimony would have been far more effective had it been played for farce. As in "Private Lives," for instance.

Miriam Hopkins, back in the medium in which she started her career and which has always held first place in her affections, does her utmost to make a person out of Jenny but is not successful in bringing the part or play to life. Victor Jory gets only fair results with the role of the husband. Martha Sleeper gives some vitality to the character of Gloria, who tells you that the life of a perennial mistress is an empty one. Helen Flint has one very amusing scene and James Todd is quite agreeable as the lawyer-friend who explains the procedure of divorce in New York State and in Reno. Little Joyce Van Patten hasn't the opportunity that "Tomorrow the World" afforded her but she is still a brilliant child actress and some day will be playing Juliet in this very town.

Cheryl Crawford has given Mr. Raphaelson's play a glossy production. The clothes provided Miss Hopkins by Valentina are quite stunning. The combination living room-bedroom set of Oliver Smith is beautiful. Mr. Raphaelson, another dramatist who attends to his own direction, has done the staging.

But "The Perfect Marriage," for all its surface smartness, for all the time and money that have gone into its production, is a disappointment. It doesn't show Mr. Raphaelson at his best. Nor Miss Hopkins at hers. She is still seeking the play that will give her her place in the affections of New York's playgoers.

Put down "The Perfect Marriage" as a repetitious, deficient and superficial play, and one that holds the attention of an audience only intermittently.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 27, 1944

But Not the Perfect Play

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

DESPITE its engaging title, its practised author and its brace of stars, *The Perfect Marriage* is an extremely disappointing play. A story of an eruption in the life of a 10-years-married couple, it washes out because it wholly fails to convince and largely fails to entertain. And one reason why it does neither might be that it tries to do both; Mr. Raphaelson, in a sense, wants to eat his cake and have it, too. He can't make up his mind whether to have a sharp look at married life that has hit the skids, or whether to whip up the kind of clever talk and bravura scenes that a Noel Coward has the skill to turn out and the sense not to go beyond. The result is something not serious enough to ring true or light enough to be gay; a contrived, protracted, metallic and dullish specimen of what might be termed impolite comedy.

On their 10th anniversary Dale and Jenny Williams find that for a year or more they have not been in love. The discovery, being unwelcome, has a bad effect on their tempers; and their sensitive efforts to see things through [illegible] as nothing compared with their explosive impulses to let things rip. They at length agree to get divorced, and each half-heartedly sets about having a little fling. In the end they talk things over, decide they have never really known each other or been grown-up about marriage and—once more in love—start over again.

* * *

Mr. Raphaelson gets off on the wrong foot by making the rift seem contrived—the starting-point for a play rather than the breaking-point of a marriage. You sense the formula of Husband Loses Wife, Husband Gets Wife. And conscious of the formula, you can't take matters very seriously; while the entertainment you would settle for is all too fitful. There are a few lively scenes in which Mr. Jory stomps about or Miss Hopkins flares up; there are a few amusing lines. But mostly there is just talk, or the intrusion of crudely drawn secondary characters. All too appropriately Mr. Raphaelson brings to the Williams' tin wedding a good deal of tinny dialogue; for as *The Perfect Marriage* lacks warmth, it also lacks the right kind of brittleness.

Of the two stars, Mr. Jory comes off much the best; his portrayal is consistent, lively and now and then deft. Miss Hopkins has some very good spitfire moments, but elsewhere is mannered and hard to seize on as a person. Martha Sleeper gets some vigor into a not very good part. Helen Flint and James Todd go through no better ones as well as they can, and Evelyn Davis has a nice scene as a maid. Pretty little Joyce Van Patten, as the precocious nine-year-old daughter of the house, isn't allowed to have much charm. Oliver Smith has designed a stylish two-part set that has more tone than anything in the play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 27, 1944

Perfect Marriage Is One For the Smart Set

By BURTON RASCOE

DOC Raphaelson, the slick dramatic counselor on domestic relations, says that when two people have enjoyed a happy, peaceful, well-bred marriage for so long a time that they have become physically and emotionally indifferent to each other, continuing their nuptials only out of mere politeness, there is nothing like a good, low-down, name-calling brawl, full of nasty recriminations and verbal blows below the belt, to make everything hunky-dory again.

He and others have said it before, but he said it again expertly, entertainingly and in a good-mannered way through three acts and five scenes last night in a play called The Perfect Marriage, which opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre before a pleased and, in large part, very swanky audience.

Undoubted Success

That The Perfect Marriage will be a success there can be no doubt. Every year there is at least one play which the "smart crowd" takes up and touts; and the crowd that is not so smart wants to see what the smart crowd has seen. The Perfect Marriage seems perfectly cut to that pattern for this season. It has everything to recommend it to the "smart crowd," including the utter banality of the story.

It has, for instance, a very tasty set by Oliver Smith which the highest priced interior decorators will approve of. Particularly will they approve of its ravishing incongruities—the rep sofa and the red-leather chair (from the Union Club, no doubt), the straight chair that seems to have been made by three different chair makers, all with different ideas about how a chair should be made; the sporting print and that surrealist thing; and those lamp shades! It is a room like a charming what-not. It is a set you can get ideas from!

Then Miss Hopkins' clothes are especially designed for her by Valentina, while Miss Sleeper's and Miss Flint's clothes (so a telegram, which arrived after I started to write this piece, breathlessly tells me) are especially designed for them by Lange. Miss Flint's and Miss Sleeper's hats (Miss Hopkins doesn't wear one) are by Dache. Other clothes are from Saks-Fifth Avenue and Bonwit Teller. Bags by Coblentz; hosiery by Delman; champagne by Mumm's; hair styles by Charles of the Ritz; deodorizer by U. S. Sanitary Specialties Corp.

5 Costume Changes

Miss Hopkins has five changes of costume and one scene in which she appears in black lace underwear, hosiery and sandals—all very chic. Miss Flint and Miss Sleeper have two changes of costume each. One stunning hat by Dache, worn by Miss Sleeper, fell off at an inconvenient moment last night; but maybe Dache can fix it so it can stay on hereafter.

The cast in this play is important, too. The lovely, gifted and vivacious Miriam Hopkins and the handsome and assured Victor Jory are starred in it. The chic and pretty Martha Sleeper is featured. In the cast, also, is, to my mind, the most beautiful and most brilliant child actress I have ever seen—Joyce Van Patten. James Todd has one excellent scene as an earnest stuffed shirt, utterly natural and convincing. Miss Flint is good and Evelyn Davis, as the colored maid, scored a big hit in one scene.

Miss Hopkins has never been seen to better advantage, as the adoring but at times rather petulant wife who can be a hellcat in a quarrel if properly provoked. Mr. Jory is perfectly cast as the designer of bombing planes, so obsessed with his work that he gives only perfunctory attention to his connubial obligations until his wife wants to divorce him.

Schnitzler would have treated the idea of The Perfect Marriage in a much subtler one-act play—and did. Samuel Raphaelson has stretched it into three acts without making it tedious, but, on the contrary, very agreeable theater.

At a swank opening, if you want to see and hear the first act try to get gallery seats.

"Snafu"

Comedy by Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman; staged by George Abbott; settings by John Root. Presented by Mr. Abbott at the Hudson Theatre, October 25, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 26, 1944

Snafu Is Enjoyable, Amusing Abbott Offering

By BURTON RASCOE

I CAN definitely promise you, I think, that you will have an amused, enjoyable, and perhaps instructive evening at Snafu, a comedy by Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman, which George Abbott presented at the Hudson last night. It is literate, honest and imaginative; it is acidly satirical in some spots, seriously thoughtful in others. The general spirit is that of good-natured levity over the misapprehensions about soldiers entertained by mothers of men in the service, by lay and military guardians of our welfare on the home front, and by civilians generally.

The comedy is not a knockout, by any means; its laughs are cerebral rather than abdominal; it is unpretentious, has its ups and downs of excitement and interest; it is a little too contrived, perhaps, at several points; its cast is not 100 per cent perfect, and you might find it a bit difficult to accept the premise laid down in the first act. But its over-all effect is of something fresh, entertaining and in good taste.

Billy Redfield Splendid

The play is Billy Redfield's from first to last, a youngster still under draft age, who, in this play, scores a triumph of really stellar proportions. Playing the part of a returned 16-year-old veteran of the fighting in New Guinea who had run away from home at 13 to enlist in the army (lying about his age) and had arisen to a sergeancy when his parents discovered where he was and inconsiderately brought about his discharge, young Redfield shows remarkable resources as an actor. His projection of every mood—of annoyance, bewilderment, disdain, severity, camaraderie, affection friendship a sense of responsibility, distaste for civilian pompositties—that he is called upon to simulate is just right, natural, unforced, convincing. His characterization is at once appealing and tough-fibred, boyish and adult, sweet and salty. . . I see by the program that he has already enlisted in the Air Combat Crew Training Corps and is subject to call when he reaches his 18th birthday. So he probably won't be in the play long; but his record there will be memorable.

THE CAST

Josephina	Eugenia Delarova
Madge Stevens	Elspeth Eric
Laura Jessup	Patricia Kirkland
Ben Stevens	Russell Hardie
Mr. Taylor	John Souther
Kate Hereford	Bethel Leslie
Aunt Emily	Enid Markey
Senator Phil Ford	Ralph W. Chambers
First Legionnaire	Edwin Cooper
Second Legionnaire	Stephen Gierasch
Ronald Stevens	Billy Redfield
Pfc. Danny Baker	Dort Clark
Mrs. Garrett	Ann Dere
Detective	Cliff Dunstan
Martha	Eve McVeagh
Col. West	Winfield Smith

The story tells of how Ronald's (Billy's) parents (Elspeth Eric and Russell Hardie) after a futile search conducted by police and private dicks for their lost son, learn by post card from him that he is fighting in New Guinea, and how they contrived to get his discharge, much to his disgust, and what a problem and a trial he became to them (and they to him) from the moment he got back. It is a lesson in forbearance on both sides.

His parents in the first place have humiliated Ronald. His commanding officer had called him in and told him he was being sent back home. When Ronald asked why, the CO said, "Your mama wants you." He doesn't take to his parents any too warmly when he arrives home; nor do they fancy the kind of presents he has brought back or his having won a bugle at craps and arising at 5 in the morning to blow it. But their preconceived ideas and apprehensions, derived from newspaper stories of delinquency and sex crimes involving soldiers make them easy prey to wrong impressions created by the fact that Ronald has invited a buddy (Dort Clark) to spend his furlough with him and this gay and reckless private gets involved in a dormitory scandal with a student of journalism (Patricia Kirkland) who has been trying to get an interview with Ronald. There is hell to pay, when a soldier falsely identified as Ronald is seen leaving the dorm by fire escape at three in the morning. Ronald is so mystified by all the strain at home that he thinks his parents are splitting up because his dad has been stepping out; so he gives his dad a good Dutch uncle talk (wonderful scene!), telling his pop he ought to see some of the pictures they show about that in the army—"They scare hell out of you." Finally he concludes the civilian situation is hopelessly snafu; so he runs off again, but this time comes back to explain why he is leaving.

Next to Billy Redfield, highest acting honors go to Enid Markey for an excellent comical caricature of a snoopy spinster and to Patricia Kirkland as the wild-eyed girl reporter. Ralph W. Chambers does an excellent satirical bit as a politician and Winfield Smith an excellent satirical bit as a literal-minded colonel.

NEW YORK SUN
October 26, 1944

The Hudson Reopens With 'Snafu,' an Entertaining Comedy of Return of a G. I.

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE Hudson theater, pride of Henry B. Harris in bygone years, is now shiny in its newness and began its season last night under new and impressive ownership with the presentation of an amiable comedy called "Snafu," George Abbott, a man of magic in local dramatics, brings it forth and I found it highly amusing for much of the way.

This comedy, written by Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman, authors new to Broadway, has the benefit of Abbott tricks and

touches. It has a very funny first act, sags somewhat in the second, but recovers sufficiently in the third to provide a generally entertaining evening. And there are some good performances in it — notably, that of Billy Redfield as the G. I. who went to war as a boy and returned as a man.

The word Snafu, if you want a polite and printable translation of the G. I. phrasing, means "Situation normal—all fouled up," and such is life in Pomona, Cal., as under-age Ronnie Stevens finds it on returning after being yanked out of the Army by his parents.

Ronald ran away from home to join up and when he comes back he is a veteran of Pacific action against the Japs. He is not yet 16, but wears a sergeant's stripes. He practices ju-jitsu upon an unsuspecting Legionnaire who gives him a greeter's slap across the back. He flattens himself upon the floor, as by habit, when a plane zooms over the house. He binds and gags a prowling private detective and stuffs him into a closet. And to his bewildered parents Ronald is pretty overwhelming.

The authors, in the writing of "Snafu," may have intended originally to bring over something of a message concerning the reintegration of a battle-toughened boy into civilian life, but the play, under Mr. Abbott's direction, is played for comedy, and frequently for its farcical values. As for Ronald, he is decorated at the finish and has the situation in Pomona, as well as in his household, well in hand.

Billy Redfield is immense as the youthful sergeant for whom readjustment isn't easy to make or to take. Russell Hardie and Elspeth Eric are very good indeed as the perplexed parents. Enid Markey is a scream as Aunt Emily. Patricia Kirkland is attractive in a role that doesn't make a great deal of sense and Edwin Cooper gets a gleam of character into the Legionnaire who is sent flying through the air. John Root's setting has the look and the feel of Southern California, with the patio just beyond the doorway.

"Snafu" is loosely constructed, but it is a play of amusing characters and situations. There was plenty of laughter at the premiere performance, as there will be in evenings to come. It's my notion that the Hudson's new comedy is there for a run.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 26, 1944

'Snafu' Presented At Hudson Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

I WOULDN'T know, but—

Well, at the Hudson Theatre, now happily in the hands of Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, "Snafu" is still in Pomona, even if Pomona isn't still in the title. Anyway, programs are informative. If you'll turn to the 1944 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, the word "snafu" is among those listed, along with "pinup girl," walkie-talkie," "GI Joe," "scuttlebutt" and "wolf," the last-named in the urban meaning of the term.

The formal definition by the encyclopedia's erudite British etymologists is, and I quote, "Snafu—military slang, meaning in a mess, haywire, and derives from the first letters of the word situation normal, all fouled up." The initials are all right, anyway.

Which means one of two things. Either that George Abbott, producer of the new tenant of the Hudson, has a couple of clever press agents—beg pardon, press representatives—in Phyllis Perlman and Marian Byram, or the Encyclopedia Britannica has at long last learned that these United States have a language of their own. I suspect Phyllis and Marian. Or even Producer Abbott, who is not above rewriting the Britannica for his own devices.

Tragic Comedy

Let's stop this stalling. Frankly, I don't find "Snafu" as hilarious as expected. It has its ups. It has its downs. It is beautifully mounted by John Root, adroitly directed by Mr. Abbott. But it just isn't in me to consider the basic situation, that of a sensitive young American soldier returned from the South Pacific, quite as comic as the Louis Solomon-Harold Buchman dialogue demands. I'd like to guffaw at Ronald and his homecoming. I'm supposed to!

But the lad's predicament strikes me as tragic. A boyish sergeant, dragged by his chevrons out of the current conflict by a doting mama and a petulant papa living in Pomona, Calif., the kid has lost his way. In the South Pacific he was happy. On the West Coast, he isn't.

On the West Coast he gets all fouled up because of a run-of-play-mill case of mistaken identity. It is a run-of-the-play-mill case of mistaken identity that could be straightened out—and would be straightened out—after half-a-minute's genuine conversation. But no! So "Snafu" goes on from scene to scene, until it's time to bring down the final curtain. Some of these scenes, several of these scenes are diverting. Many aren't. And they seldom hang honestly together.

Cast Competent

The acting is largely on the right side. Russell Hardie, made-up beyond his natural years, is as forthright as can he as the returned soldier's phony father. Especially is he at ease in the delicious scene in which Ronald Stevens, son, instructs Ben Stevens, parent, about the birds, the bees and the flowers as studied and imitated by GI Joe in the South Pacific. This interlude above the disconnected others, is the high spot of "Snafu." It's warm, it's real, it's touching.

Of course, Billy Redfield's returned soldier —Sgt. Ronald Stevens, of Pomona, Calif.— helps out tremendously. Still under draft age although already enlisted in the Air Combat Crew Training Corps, Billy's a natural born actor He comes by it naturally.

Patricia Kirkland, daughter of Actress Nancy Carroll and playwright-producer Jack Kirkland, is good enough as the lovelorn Laura, as are Eugenia Delarova as the south-of-the-border Josephina, Enid Markey as the dirty-minded Aunt Emily, Ralph Chambers as a vote-getting Senator, Dort Clark as a want-what-I-want-when-I-want-it private — he's the cause of all the cooked-up trouble— and Eve McVeagh as an ardent Australian in what used to be known as an interesting condition.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 26, 1944

O K G I

By HOWARD BARNES

SNAFU is an explosive bit of military slang, meaning, in polite language, situation normal all fouled up. It is also the title of an explosive farce, which George Abbott shepherded into the Hudson Theater last evening. It is a rough and ready comedy, with a tendency to get into farcical snarls, but it is chock full of honesty and laughter. A brilliant group of youngsters contributes the former quality to a workable script. The authors, Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman, have conceived some wonderfully funny lines and business. And Abbott has made the whole show spin through three acts triumphantly. A new hit has arrived in town.

* * *

Those who presumed that "Snafu" would be a bit off-color were very wrong. One of the chief delights of the offering is its consistent fusing of crack-pot nonsense and the grim realities of today and tomorrow. The kid soldier who returns home from the South Pacific to discover that a lot of civilian re-education is in order, knows how to kill, has heard about the bees and flowers and is vastly impatient. His instincts remain dignified and true throughout. As interpreted by Billy Redfield, the character is a captivating youngster, a pertinent pivot for a gay and disarming entertainment.

* * *

Redfield, playing a sixteen-year-old veteran of island-hopping, realizes the role superbly. If the play goes a bit haywire at times, it is not his fault. His uncontrolled use of Judo on occasion, or his gentle admonishment of his father when he is up to his ears in snafu are scenes of genuine merriment. There are too many situations in "Snafu" for a tightly-knit comedy, what with an Australian girl leading the boy's family to think he is a potential father and some rather devious variations on the mistaken identity gag. Fortunately Redfield and his assistants make the flaws in the production rather negligible.

* * *

Bethel Leslie plays the high school sweetheart of a home-coming yarn with great poise and sincerity. It is her first Broadway role. It will certainly not be her last. Patricia Kirkland, as a confused young school-of-journalism student, is excellent, and Dort Clark is forthright, as he should be, in the part of the hero's buddy. Just to make sure, Abbott has some knowing acting elders on hand and the authors have given them a break. Russell Hardie is delightful as the bewildered father of a kid who is no longer a kid; Enid Markey is fine as an antimacassar aunt and Elspeth Eric, John Souther and the others give substance to a brilliant collaboration of performing. Since Abbott has employed his suavest tricks of direction and John Root has designed a fetching setting, all is very well with "Snafu," in spite of its title.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 26, 1944

A Farce About A Boy Veteran

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

GEORGE ABBOTT, whose forte is youth in its bouncier moods, brought another kid play to Broadway Wednesday night. This one is about a youngster who joined the Army at 14; became a sergeant and saw hard fighting against the Japs; and, then, when his age came out, was honorably discharged. The play itself deals in farcical terms with what followed Ronald's return home, and is by no means one of Mr. Abbott's brighter offerings. There are some laughs scattered through it, and there is a very nice performance by Billy Redfield as Ronald; and audiences who made box-office of such fare as *Jasie* and *Wallflower* will probably make box-office of *Snafu*. For myself, I found most of it forced and mechanical. The story rambles rather than builds; the situations are both easy to anticipate and hard—even for farce—to accept; and to fill in the cavities, the authors have fallen back on horse-play, gags, and touches of smirkiness.

* * *

The whole thing, in fact, is all too opportunistically flung together for what it will yield in broad laughs. Comic maids, comic old maids, ringing phones, mistaken identity, bound-and-gagged detectives falling out of closets, and a whole bundle of farcical misunderstandings—all these things reduce *Snafu* to senselessness while only fitfully converting it into fun. At the same time, young Ronald himself has not been altogether fitted into a farcical framework; the adolescent who returns home after leading a tough adult Army life is fleetingly a person and even a problem. It seems to me that *Snafu* had better possibilities — and may even have started off—as comedy rather than farce. Had Ronald been kept in something like credible relationships with his parents, his school principal and the girl next door, the fun might have been quieter, but it would have flowed out of something more natural and likeable. As it is, when *Snafu* isn't funny it's just junk.

Mr. Abbott's direction takes up some but by no means all of the slack; and there are nice performances by Elspeth Eric, Enid Markey, Russell Hardie and others in the cast.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 24, 1944

Situation Normal: Abbott Fun Up To Its Usual Standard in 'Snafu'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

GEORGE ABBOTT, master chef of a particular kind of glossy, cockeyed humor, is cooking on the front burner again. At the Hudson Theatre, where "Snafu" opened last night, the situation is excellent.

In his secret heart Abbott must be rather a monster, for nothing induces in him so much glee as somebody in trouble. He is particularly happy when youngsters are in a terrible mess, and his current victim is a sergeant who has got bounced out of the army after a heroic career in the Southwest Pacific because he is under 16.

This lad is shamefaced about how he happens to come home to Pomona. A fine big battle is going on in New Guinea when his commanding officer sends for him and says his mother wants him—so here he is.

Plenty of Messes

He finds that his father and mother don't assimilate very easily. He tries to be nice to them and gives his mother a bloodstained Jap battle flag and his father a hari-kari sword he took from under an extinct Nip officer, but somehow they seem to be under a strain. He gives his father a lecture on sex, but this doesn't help.

Pretty soon, according to the Abbott formula, the adolescent warrior is in messes with girls, cops, parents, neighbors and the school principal—in spite of the fact that he's a perfectly nice, innocent lad trying to please everybody. He does, of course, toss a Legionnaire and a detective around by a judicious use of judo, but he's far from being a roughneck.

The play which Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman have written about reconversion of a soldier to civilian life has a couple of holes in it, but Abbott, with his casting and his direction, has patched them up so the seams hardly show. "Snafu" may not have the symmetry and complete efficiency of the perfectly constructed comedy—but it had me laughing all the way and its final moment jolted me into hilarious tears, so what's the difference?

Miss Markey Scores

As the phrase goes, it's a typical Abbott cast. As Ronald, the returned Jap-killer, Billy Redfield is a pure delight. Russell Hardie and Elspeth Eric, as the bewildered parents who seem to think they have taken a human booby-trap into their home, are equally right and funny.

Shrewdly chosen, too, is Enid Markey as a neighborhood old maid who looks into Time Magazine instead of under beds and gets more thrills. Miss Markey, in addition to making two or three scenes her own during the course of the play, is the key figure in the very funny final curtain.

Eugenia Delarova, erstwhile Russian ballerina, is excellent in her first speaking role as a Mexican maid named Josephina; Patricia Kirkland and Bethel Leslie are pleasant as a couple of young fry, Dort Clark helps as a soldier pal of Ronald's, and all the others are properly expert.

The new owners of the Hudson Theatre are Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, who bought the place with leftovers from their "Life With Father" profits. They found a good tenant in Mr. Abbott.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 26, 1944

Honorable Discharge

By LEWIS NICHOLS

GEORGE ABBOTT, who is one of the most voluble spokesmen for the younger generation, is at it again in "Snafu," which he produced and directed for the Hudson last evening. It is not the normal Abbott situation to be fouled up, although strict honesty might compel that charge for this morning; his newest chapter on youth is weak, and beyond a few happy gags it is not particularly funny. Perhaps the whole saga of extreme youth in its contact with parents and the sex demon, growing pains and mistaken situations, has been written out. "Snafu," in short, is a variation on "Kiss and Tell" and the others, although it is not as good as most of them.

* * *

The authors of "Snafu" are Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman, two script writers from the Western world. They have fallen on a good idea—what would happen when a fifteen-year-old boy, discharged because of age by the Army, comes home again. Having fought in the Pacific, he presumably would be able to take care of himself and probably would have difficulty getting on with his father and mother. The situation is legitimate, but what is not quite legitimate is the mechanical manner in which the authors have completed their play. They have tossed away opportunities to make human characters play human situations, preferring instead an occasional gag; they abandon warmth for contrived incidents.

Probably the main trouble lies in the author's failure to decide which kind of fifteen-year-old they are setting out to show. He is tough, and he would be, but the authors also show that he might not be quite grown-up—also a possibility. The Messrs. Solomon and Buchman, however, do not blend the two, and the result is that young Sergeant Stevens, home from the wars, seems pretty much a puppet being pulled around a stage. He just isn't real. A fair number of the other characters are from stock—the girl next door, the other girl who mistakes the sergeant's buddy for the sergeant, the school principal, senator and comedy servant. An audience can give a fair guess how it will come out and the surprises along the way are few.

* * *

As the boy, Billy Redfield runs into the difficulties in the script. On the tough side, he is all right, on the side of a normal 15, he seems a bit unsure. Russell Hardie is the father, sometimes overemphasizing the bewilderment of that parent, and Elspeth Eric is the mother. Patricia Kirkland has the part of a journalism student who thinks the buddy is the sergeant and an attractive girl named Bethel Leslie is the young lady from next door. Enid Markey is properly daft as a schoolteacher; Engenia Delarova, from the ballet, has her first speaking role as the servant, and the twinkle in her eye suggests she enjoys it. In his direction, Mr. Abbott has tossed in a few funny actions, but there are a good many telephone calls to suggest that even Mr. Abbott has been given pause about what to do next. John Root's setting is attractive.

NEW YORK POST
October 26, 1944

'Snafu' a Good Laugh Show With That George Abbott Touch

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT IS generally agreed that the problem of what to do about the returned soldier is going to be a very tough one when the boys finally come marching home. But it should prove fairly simple compared to the dilemma of the Stevens family of Pomona, Calif., whose son Ronald makes a reluctant re-entry from the South Pacific because he ran away from home to join the Army and is still shockingly under military age.

Ronald's belligerent return to civilian life is chronicled in considerable detail, amid general merriment, at the Hudson Theatre in "Snafu," a brand new comedy produced by George Abbott with something more than his usual eclat. When Mr. Abbott is on his toes as a director he has a way of drawing more laughs from the audience than the authors actually wrote into the script. He was in good form last night.

"Snafu" is a military slang term meaning "situation normal—all fouled up." In other words, things are in a terrible mess. The program notes proudly that the Encyclopedia Britannica lists the word among 46 new expressions that have drifted into the language since World War II began.

Blood and Guts

Ronald, aged sixteen, is naturally pretty sore on being forcibly returned to civilian life at the request of his distressed parents who have had a detective agency trying to find him for months. Imagine his chagrin after battling the Japs with Col. Kerrigan's Terrors to be called in by his C. O. and told: "Sergeant, your Mama wants you!"

When one of the committee of welcoming Legionnaires taps him playfully on the shoulder, Ronald automatically tosses him over his head in approved Jiu Jitsu style, and from then on it's decidedly Snafu in the Stevens menage.

Young Billy Redfield, who is actually just seventeen, gives an uncommonly effective performance as the Sergeant who comes home with presents for everybody including a genuine Japanese battle flag for Mama, with real blood on it, and proceeds to wake up the entire household at 5:30 in the next morning with stirring bugle calls in the patio.

Russell Hardie and Elspeth Eric are properly thunder-struck as the bewildered parents of this seasoned veteran from overseas, and the scene in which Papa decides to have a little talk with Ronald, only to discover that his son knows more about sex than anybody in Pomona, is one of the high spots of the evening.

Enid Markey, Dort Clark, John Souther and Patricia Kirkland perform proficiently in a generally good cast, there is an attractive setting by John Root, and the Hudson Theatre looks very natty under its new management, which includes Russel Crouse, Howard Lindsay and a number of other rich realtors.

Now Available **Motion Picture Critic's Reviews**

"Violet"

Comedy by Whitfield Cook; staged by Mr. Cook; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by Albert Margolies at the Belasco Theatre, October 24, 1944.

THE CAST

Clarence	John Cherry
Pete Granden	Harvey Stephens
Mrs. Elfie Tunison	Doro Merande
Elisha Bly	Len Hollister
Lily Foster	Helen Claire
Esther	Paula Trueman
Bruce	Billy Nevard
Violet	Pat Hitchcock
Evelyn	Fuzzy McQuade
Arthur	Martin David
Susie	Jimsey Somers
Sidney Watrous	Carlo Robinson
Walter Meeker	Mason Adams
Crystal	Fay Baker
Charlotte Watrous	Joan Vitez
Henry Watrous	Leslie Litomy
W. W. Upthegrove	Russell Gaige

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 25, 1944

A Shrinking Violet

By HOWARD BARNES

AT BEST "Violet" generates a certain frenetic comic confusion. On the whole this new play at the Belasco belies its title. It is about as sweet as a green crab-apple. Even though the central character is a supposedly likable brat who solves the problems of her elders, the piece is not on the sympathetic side. Once again some excellent players prowl around searching for a script. Pat Hitchcock, the talented daughter of the great English movie-maker, Alfred Hitchcock, delivers her lines like a veteran. She has such assistants as Harvey Stephens, Doro Merande and Paula Trueman to give every inflection to the comedy that it deserves. There are far too few funny moments in the offering.

* * *

Whitfield Cook has written and staged the play with an eye to effect rather than effective theater. He has constructed a good madhouse on the Belasco stage, as a twice-wed laundry proprietor who wants to be a painter embarks on a third matrimonial venture with ex-wives and assorted children standing by. The trouble is that it is not a very merry madhouse. There are passages in the second act when "Violet" seems about to become a true bit of farcical nonsense. They are, let me assures you, tiny mirages in a desert of tedious make-believe.

* * *

For Cook has conceived a situation without substance. Violet may have been a real thirteen-year-old on the printed page. She is little more than an obnoxious moppet at the Belasco, as she meddles with a matrimonial mess. And it is no fault of little Miss Hitchcock, who plays the progressive schoolchild as close to the line as one might wish her to hew. She brings a character to life. Unfortunately, the play leaves the character less amusing than annoying.

* * *

Stephens, whom you may remember playing with Ruth Gordon in "Over 21," takes an even worse rap from the writing. As the bedevilled husband and father of several establishments, he is asked to be tremendously charming while acting like a sub-moron. His actions speak louder than the words he has to say. Miss Merande gives one of her fine character bits as a Vermont matron, who journeys all over the globe vicariously and Miss Trueman rarely fails to underline the humor in the part of a busy-body maiden trying to keep a flock of step-brothers and sisters straight. Howard Bay has designed a nice setting, but it might have had a lot more of comic consequence to frame than it has in "Violet."

NEW YORK POST
October 25, 1944

'Violet' an Obnoxious Comedy About a Precocious Brat

By WILELLA WALDORF

WITH financial backing by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Whitefield Cook has dramatized his magazine stories about a brat who mixes into her father's marital affairs. Presumably Metro thinks that "Violet" will make a good movie. As revealed last night at the Belasco Theatre it is a depressingly synthetic comedy full of quips that aren't as funny as the author thinks they are, and forced situations that are merely embarrassing for actors and audience.

"I'm precocious. It's my chief charm," Violet (aged thirteen) informs the lady who was thinking of becoming her father's third wife.

"It escapes me," replies Helen Claire, speaking for quite a lot of people in the audience.

Mr. Cook's idea of convulsing comedy is to fill the stage as full as possible of children and adults. Most of the adults then proceed to act, and talk, like children, while Violet, leader of the young contingent, tries to be adult and succeeds only in being exhausting.

Some well-known actors are involved and since most of them probably know only too well that they're stuck in something pretty dismal, we shall just try to forget it all as soon as possible.

Violet herself is played by Pat Hitchcock, daughter of Alfred Hitchcock, the film director. Young Miss Hitchcock first stepped out on a Broadway stage two years ago in "Solitaire" and made a pleasant impression which her present vehicle does much to dispel.

Howard Bay's setting, a remodeled Vermont farmhouse, is far too attractive for the play it decorates.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 25, 1944

Don't Send Me 'Violet'

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

VIOLET follows a farce-comedy formula that has been known to succeed, but not often. In *Violet* it certainly never succeeds for a moment: this yarn about a much-married man whose two former wives and five young children descend on him just as he is working up a new romance is a trying and interminable evening. Mr. Cook's script, which toils at being sophisticated, cute and wacky all at once, never manages to be any of these things in the favorable sense of the term. And Mr. Cook's staging, which makes a number of professional actors perform as though they had never seen anything more exalted than the inside of a barn, brings out the worst in every line.

The unorthodox family reunion that *Violet* commemorates presumably centers—if titles have any validity—in Violet herself. She is the oldest of the children, a precocious brat of 13 given to very knowing chatter, who first decides to be a Miss Fixit and plug for wedding bells. At the end, of course, it turns out that all Violet's glib worldliness is just a pose; what she really yearns for is the domesticity and affection she has never had. F. Hugh Herbert told much the same story a bit better last spring in *For Keeps*; at least his dialogue was better, and his brat less irritating.

And along with Violet go the still younger children, wholly given to making noise and using the stairs; the wives, one deep in psychiatry, the other far along in nymphomania; the current flame, whose burning is less than gemlike; and a line-up of second husbands, dog fanciers, rustic poets and maiden sisters. All talking away very tiresomely.

As Violet, little Pat Hitchcock no doubt carried out grown-up orders, but a certain amount of disobedience might have helped. Harvey Stephens, as Violet's father, got by a bit better than most; better, certainly, than Helen Claire, a major victim of the direction. Most of the other performers were victims, too, along with most of the audience: an exception to this last being the two ladies who strolled down the aisle to their second-row seats just one minute before the final curtain descended.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 25, 1944

'Violet' Visits the Theatre on Its Way to the Movies, Worse Luck

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IF I were, say, a diaper service looking for a radio serial for tired housewives, I might invest in "Violet." (Organ music up, then down. Announcer: "Pete, once more in love with the girl he should have married in the first place if he and she hadn't been so proud, the darlings, now has his four children by two wives on his hands. Will he and the girl be confronted by the two wives? You can just bet that soggy dishrag they will, and for the thrilling details tune in at this same time tomorrow—but for mercy's sakes fix your hair, will you?")

If I were, say again, a motion picture company eager to hang out the SOS sign (Same Old Stuff), I might also invest in "Violet"—preferably under an assumed name.

Unhappily, the Belasco Theatre got "Violet" last night and the Belasco is a place where plays are supposed to happen. This one is not a play. It is a dramatization—or a decalcomania would be a better word—by Whitfield Cook of some beauty-parlor magazine stories by Whitfield Cook. All about a precocious girl. You can tell she is precocious because she wears horn-rimmed glasses.

MGM Flips Some Coins

I shan't bother you with the plot, because if you want to you can see it in the movies a few months hence for 15 cents or two bits. Instead, I should like to point with alarm—and quite seriously — to another disservice Hollywood is doing the stage.

According to Sam Zolotow, The Times' certified public accountant, "Violet" is financed entirely by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, although one Albert Margolies is listed as the producer. Mr. Zolotow, an excellent reporter, stated yesterday:

"Metro not only supplied the wherewithal . . . but went a step further by neatly tieing up the screen rights . . . in one of those grand Hollywood pre-production deals.

"The film company acquired the rights on these terms: a deposit of $100,000 to apply against a maximum of $250,000, the difference coming from weekly payments based on a percentage of the box-office intake"

Pat Hitchcock Good

I maintain that such a fantastic investment, practical though it may be in the long run so far as the movie company is concerned, is no less than contemptuous of the legitimate theatre. "Violet" isn't even worth a shoestring investment as a comedy.

In the title role is Patricia Hitchcock, daughter of the daddy dumplings of thriller films, Alfred Hitchcock. Young Pat deserves a better fate, for she has stage presence, humor and intelligence. Harvey Stephens plays the father of all the children (they are called Batch 1 and Batch 2, which should be whimsical enough to kill you) and Helen Claire is the girl he should have married in the first place.

NEW YORK SUN
October 25, 1944

'Violet', Done at Belasco, Monotonous Play About a Precocious Child

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE Belasco made its second try of the season last night and the occasion was far from a happy one. For "Violet," installed by Albert Margolies at the 44th Street playhouse, provides an evening of precocity and monotony. The writing is heavy-handed; the direction is not helpful.

"Violet" places a swarm of brats upon the Belasco stage, but in this new comedy, written and directed by Whitfield Cook, they bring forth scant merriment. And "Violet" is the sort of play that makes dull performers of grown-ups who have been engaging players in previous Broadway appearances.

The child, Violet, quite an overpowering creature as played by Pat Hitchcock, sets about to aid her twice-married father in taking his third bride, and she finally has her way. It's New Year's at Pete Granden's remodeled Vermont farmhouse, and when they populate it with ex-wives, six scampering children, village characters and Pete's first sweetheart, who is to be Mrs. G. No. 3, they get a lot of traffic moving endlessly across the stage and upstairs and down—but they get very little play.

Harvey Stephens is ordinarily a good actor, as you certainly know if you saw him in Ruth Gordon's "Over Twenty-one." And Helen Claire had her wonderful Cindy Lou days in "Kiss the Boys Goodby." But both are distinctly at a disadvantage in "Violet." The ever-dependable Doro Merande, in a character bit, got a smile or two from B 1. Paula Trueman tries to bring some life to a skimpy role. Fay Baker and Joan Vitez are the ex-wives who show up in response to Violet's telegraphic summons and join in the commotion. Howard Bay has come through with an attractive interior setting.

On Thursday evening of last week the Broadway theater was soaring, but last night it was off form again, and decidedly so. "Violet" is a well-meaning comedy but a meager one.

And it's very dreary, too.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 25, 1944

Filmland Stage Try, Violet, Shrinks

By BURTON RASCOE

THE movies are certainly getting desperate for material and not at all choosy about what they pay big money for. The printed report (and it hasn't been denied by the alleged purchasers) is that MGM paid $250,000 for the motion picture rights to Violet before it opened at the Belasco last night, $100,000 down and weekly installments of 15 per cent of the gross until an additional $150,000 is reached. Thus this play, which is practically zero in entertainment has a run of from 10 to 16 weeks underwritten by movie money, even if the box-office take is only about half of the weekly operating cost.

The play is without a spark of merit. It is unashamedly and amateurishly drawn from Junior Miss, except that the Violet of this show is not a romantic Little Miss Fix-it, as Judy of Junior Miss was, but a precocious brat of a Little Miss Fix-it, like the cerebral monstrosity in Kiss and Tell. Like Judy, she gets things in an implausible mess for her begetter, and like Judy, all her best laid plans pan out in pat mechanical fashion.

Upon this crude framework, the author and director, Whitfield Cook, has also quite unashamedly superimposed the now threadbare plot once used by O. Henry with pleasant effect, about the working boy and the working girl who blew all their savings on their separate vacations, where both pretended they were wealthy cosmopolites, fell in love and confessed their deceptions. Mr. Cook makes the boy in this case a twice-divorced laundryman, with a litter of five kids and two wives. He pretends to the fiancee he neglected to marry 14 years ago, that he is now a successful painter, when they accidentally meet again for the first time. He invites her to his "country home" in Vermont. She arrives, wearing a borrowed mink coat, and pretends she has become, meanwhile, a famous concert singer, just back from a triumphant tour of South America. (She is really only an old maid singing teacher in Albany.)

They have just gone into the love clinch, when Mr. Cook draws upon the badly worn situation, used in several flops of past seasons, where it is daddy's time, under the court rulings, to have the custody of his brats; and in troop as uninteresting a bunch of youngsters as I ever saw on the stage. Judy, I mean Violet, immediately takes charge of the situation to the annoyance of everyone concerned, secretly sending wires, signed by her father's name, to his divorced wives saying their children have measles and to come at once. (One of the ex-wives is in New York and the other in Pennsylvania; the farmhouse in Vermont is snowbound; yet they arrive overnight, which should give you an idea of the improbabilities you are asked to believe in right from the first.)

The first act was tough enough to take, but the next two were worse, and the deserters after the first act were both numerous and fortunate. When I say the direction was woefully inept, perhaps I should give a for-instance. Well, a few minutes after the play opens, the caretaker (who is also the owner's cook) announced that all he has in the house to eat is canned pea soup and some pickled pigs-feet. The master gives his servant a bottle of champagne to ice. Two minutes later the reunited love kids sit down to eat. The champagne has been iced, in those two minutes, and the caretaker has also prepared and served a meal with a visible garnish of fresh lettuce, in the dead of winter on a Vermont farm! Again, Pat Hitchcock, who plays Violet, telephones the village stationmaster and gives him a telegram with detailed instructions to send to two such names as Mrs. Henry Watrous and Mrs. Crystal Granden with complicated addresses, and she speaks so fast it couldn't be taken down on a phonograph record, much less by a partially deaf old man at the other end of the line with a pencil. She is not asked to repeat or spell out anything.

The principals were so thoroughly licked by the vapid lines and amateurish direction that only one of them, Paula Trueman, showed to any advantage. Doro Merande is in the play but for no apparent reason, except to clutter up the stage, along with the other supernumeraries.

If Violet is worth $250,000 to the movies, even Last Step, which closed almost as soon as it opened, should be worth $1,000,000 to them; it at least had some originality in it.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 25, 1944

'Violet' Presented At Belasco Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

NO! But definitely.

The long-winded little lady who talks herself and her play to death at the Belasco is the current theatre's greatest bore. From nine o'clock till nigh onto eleven, she seldom keeps her mouth shut. As my dear departed mother once remarked about a visiting clergyman who came to preach when our regular padre was away, she—the "Violet" in 44th Street—goes down deeper, stays down longer and comes up drier than you'd think possible.

Slowly, surely, she wears the customers down. Talk, talk, talk of a late December evening. Talk, talk, talk at noon the following day. Talk, talk, talk throughout a morning two days later. And in Vermont, where the natives inside are taciturn and the weather outside is terrible. If all the words spoken by Patricia Hitchcock were laid end to end, they'd reach precisely nowhere, meeting up with the play into which they have been written.

No, Whitfield Cook's dramatization of his own short stories, as produced by Albert Margolies and acted by Harvey Stephens, Helen Claire, Paula Trueman and Alfred Hitchcock's afore-mentioned daughter, just won't do.

Yes, but No

And what a story!

Pete Granden is a frustrated, and, from the samples of his work exhibited at the Belasco, painfully mediocre artist. I doubt if he could manage to get his paintings hung in the Museum of Modern Art. They look like open-air Washington Square brush-work to me. And, at matrimony, he is scarcely more successful. First tied up with Crystal, this marriage is no go. Then tied up with Charlotte, this marriage also is a failure. Lily is his girl.

But as a father, Pete is prolific. Bruce and Violet by his first wife. Evelyn, Arthur and Susie by his second. Around in 44th St., the stage is full of them. Talking, screaming, laughing, crying, crawling, skipping, eating, sleeping and going to the bathroom, they make life a burden, playgoing an ordeal. These, with their mothers, their sisters, their cousins, their aunts, their hired men and their father's sweetheart are more than you should be asked to take.

You *are* asked to take them, however, along with the "Violet" who gives the piece its title. You are asked to take them, and all of them, for as lacklustre an evening as I've ever spent on Broadway. Take them, yes. Like them, no.

No, but Definitely

Now for the acting.

Well, Harvey Stephens, pleasantly remembered as the harassed newspaper publisher in Ruth Gordon's "Over 21," gives his not unworthy best to Pete Granden, the boy-friend of one, the husband of two, and the father of five. Don't blame him if the role is thankless.

Helen Claire, pleasantly remembered as the Southern belle in "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," gives her not unworthy best as Lily Foster, Peter's girl-friend. Don't blame her if the role is thankless.

Paula Trueman is practically back in "You Can't Take It With You" as Esther, somebody's sister. Doro Merande is as funny as she can be as a poker-faced native of Vermont. Fay Baker is one of Peter's unsuccessful wives. Joan Vitez is the other. What he saw in them, you'll never know from me. Or from the performance at the Belasco. Patricia Hitchcock, as the jibber-jabber Violet, has a tough time in the title role. So would Ethel Barrymore.

Then there're the other children. Billy Nevard as Bruce, Fuzzy McQuade as Evelyn, Martin David as Arthur and Jimsey Somers as Susie. As Bernard Shaw points out, youth is too good to be wasted on young people. . . . Which brings me back to where I started. No! But definitely.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 25, 1944

Nope

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FOR the ingredients of "Violet" Whitfield Cook has reached to the bottom of the bag and has come up with some pretty strange things—as well as performances. It has occurred to him that a comedy might be written about an often-married artist who is seeking to take unto himself another wife, while the children of his earlier adventures scamper through a Vermont house. Maybe

Mr. Cook is right, although the proof of the pudding as offered at the Belasco suggests not. Let the question remain open; as to the evil of today—"Violet"—that one is tedious and silly and almost hauntingly bad.

Aside from the fact that a new play opened, perhaps the news of last night's knuckle-cracking by the drama lay in the fact that Pat Hitchcock was in it. Pat is the young daughter of Alfred Hitchcock, the movie director, and it is hard to say what she will be like when she gets a role more suitable, or is directed by her father. In "Violet" she is monotonous, but the fault isn't necessarily hers. Harvey Stevens, Helen Claire, the always wry Doro Merande are some of the others. It was Miss Claire in one of the earlier love dialogues who remarked: "This sounds like old newspapers," a line which seemed to have some wisdom in it somewhere.

"I Remember Mama"

Play by John van Druten; based on a novel by Kathryn Forbes; staged by Mr. van Druten; settings by George Jenkins; presented by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d at the Music Box Theatre, October 19, 1944.

THE NEW YORK SUN
October 20, 1944

'I Remember Mama,' Play of Great Warmth, Has Its Premiere at Music Box

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE new producing firm of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d brought excitement into the Music Box last night and additional importance to the theatrical season with the presentation of "I Remember Mama," a fond and beguiling play of Norwegian-American family life in the early years of this century.

It is a leisurely play, episodic in form and unconventional in treatment, and it represents a combination of first-rate writing, excellent direction and ensemble acting at its best. John van Druten has done the writing and the staging; Mady Christians and her associates provide the acting. And the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein, teamed as producers for the first time, have contributed a stunning production.

"I Remember Mama" is a play of characterization and it brings forth performances of skill and fluency. Mady Christians is the Mama of the play, the Mama of the mythical bank account, and she gives her finest performance in the local theater to date. Oscar Homolka has variety and robustness in his playing of the limping, grim-visaged Uncle Chris, given to violence and to drink but who has a great heart. And that rising young actress, Joan Tetzel, is extraordinarily capable in a difficult assignment, doubling as Katrin and as the play's narrator.

The locale of "I Remember Mama," adapted by Mr. van Druten from Kathryn Forbes's "Mama's Bank Account," reveals the resourceful and self-sacrificing Mama and her brood in San Francisco. It shows them scrimping along to met life's necessities; it pictures them in illness and in health and brings forth their humors and discords, their disappointments and little exaltations. In any and every emergency Mama is always there.

When little Dagmar, who loves animals, is in the hospital Mama gets to see her by posing as a scrubwoman. When the crusty Uncle Chris is dying, and having his final drink as he does so, Mama is at his bedside. When the discouraged Katrin gives up ir her ambition to be an author it's Mama who descends upon a famous woman writer in her daughter's behalf. It's Mama who carries the family along, and Mady Christians, as Mama, carries the play for much of the way.

Besides Miss Christians, Mr. Homolka and Miss Tetzel, there are others who come through with winning performances. Adrienne Gessner is the agitated Aunt Trina, who marries little Mr. Thorkelson, the undertaker, admirably played by Bruno Wick. Carolyn Hummel is excellent as Dagmar, who is so devoted to cats, dogs and rabbits, and Frances Heflin has spirit as Christine. Richard Bishop is effectively in the picture as Papa. Ellen Mahar and Ruth Gates are fussy aunts, and Oswald Marshall is the scholarly Mr. Hyde, who reads Dickens beautifully but who gives bad checks.

"I Remember Mama" is played in short and long scenes. It's presented on revolving stages and the fade-out technic is used. George Jenkins has done a fine job in designing and lighting the production and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are colorfully of the period.

THE CAST

Katrin	Joan Tetzel
Mama	Mady Christians
Papa	Richard Bishop
Dagmar	Carolyn Hummel
Christine	Frances Heflin
Mr. Hyde	Oswald Marshall
Nels	Marlon Brando
Aunt Trina	Adrienne Gessner
Aunt Sigrid	Ellen Mahar
Aunt Jenny	Ruth Gates
Uncle Chris	Oscar Homolka
A Woman	Louise Lorimer
Mr. Thorkelson	Bruno Wick
Dr. Johnson	William Pringle
Arne	Robert Antoine
A Nurse	Marie Gale
Another Nurse	Dorothy Elder
Soda Clerk	Frank Babcock
Madeline	Cora Smith
Dorothy Schiller	Ottilie Kruger
Florence Dana Moorhead	Josephine Brown
Bellboy	Herbert Kenwith

The firm of Rodgers & Hammerstein is off to a successful start. "I Remember Mama" is delightful. It has great warmth and tenderness and Mr. van Druten has directed it brilliantly. It gives him, I suspect, his second hit in 45th Street.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 20, 1944

I Remember Mama Beautiful and Human

By BURTON RASCOE

I REMEMBER Mama, which opened at the Music Box last night, is breathtakingly beautiful. If there is any justice in the world it will run as long as Life with Father, and I believe it will, for it is a natural: I can hardly imagine any one's not enjoying it. It is like a mandarin dinner, which lasts for three hours and in which very dish among innumerable courses is perfectly prepared, perfectly served, and designed to whet your appetite for the course that follows, and when the end is reached you are not surfeited but refreshed and pleased with the world.

Mady Christians and Oscar Homolka are starred and Joan Tetzel is featured, which is as it should be; but every one of the 22 characters in the play, including a cat, is perfectly cast and perfectly directed. Even the cat wags his tail on cue. The settings, designed and lighted by George Jenkins, are masterpieces of mood, manner, realism and imagination. Every costume, designed by Lucinda Ballard, is carefully thought out so that it is exactly suited to the character portrayed and helps in a subtle, unobtrusive manner, almost as much as do the lines of the play, to elucidate the character.

Van Druten Dramatization

I can see now why Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd fell so much in love with this play that they left their habitual chores as composer and librettist and lavished their care, as producers, upon it, without any possible financial motive, no matter how much money the play makes (for any extra income they receive now goes into incomes taxes).

John Van Druten, who dramatized I Remember Mama, from Kathryn Forbes' novel Mama's Bank Account, has again demonstrated that he is the most ingenious and skillful technician now writing for the theater. If his Voice of the Turtle is an amazing tour-de-force of taste and subtlety, so also is I Remember Mama. It is not a great drama, any more than The Voice of the Turtle is, but it is superb theater. And, inasmuch as he directed this play, as well as the Voice, here's another argument that playwrights who have any talent for directing should stage their own plays. There is even a touch like the faucet in the Voice: an unwatched kettle boils on an old-fashioned kitchen stove throughout the evening, symbolic of the brood-hen efficiency with which Mama (Miss Christians) runs her household and protects her loved ones.

Truthful, Human Story

The story tells of a year or so in the life of a Norwegian-American family in San Francisco at about the turn of the century. Mama and Papa came to this country, not to get rich (Mama says, "I'd like to be rich just as I'd like to be 10 feet high—for certain things; for other things, to be 10 feet high is not so good"), but to be with their relatives and neighbors, who had already gone to San Francisco. They have four children so thoroughly Americanized they don't speak Norwegian. Mama has three sisters, two married and one finally about to be married at 42, all very unlike her and unlike one another in character and temperament. She also has a brother, Uncle Chris (Oscar Homolka), who is the "head of the family," a terrifying, blustering peasant who is shrewd, forthright and with a secret mission in life—that of earning as much money as he can to enable poor children who have disabled legs to be able to walk without a limp, as he did, because his parents could not pay to have his injured leg properly treated.

The play is in a succession of scenes and blackouts, with a narrator (Joan Tetzel), who is also a participant in the action, as was the stagehand in Our Town. The play begins with Miss Tetzel, spotted at a writing desk, left, and reading her manuscript aloud, and fades into a scene in the combination kitchen and living room of the Forbes home, a frame dwelling on Telegraph Hill; and throughout the evening there are switches from small, intimate scenes to larger ones, and back again—all to tell the simple, truthful, human story of Mama and Papa, their children, their star boarder (a retired Shakespearean actor, who skips town without paying but leaving them with something better than money in the form of things of the mind and spirit), two snoopy and hypocritical sisters and one sweet, dumb one (Adrienne Gessner), the latter's timid fiance, and various townspeople who impinge upon their lives.

There is no "plot" any more than there is in Life with Father, though there is a story about Mama's bank account which I won't reveal to you; it is just wonderful stuff, enchanting, deeply touching at times but mostly filled with the joy of life. All the comedy (and there is much of it) comes, not from wisecracks or forced lines, but out of the character's natural reaction to a situation, as when Richard Bishop can't remember the saying about the show must go on and Miss Gessner thinks a moment and brightly says, "The mails must go through." That, as we say in the theater, tore the house down.

I'd say get in your ticket order for I Remember Mama early if you don't want to have to wait till next spring to see the show; for the demand will be great and steady. Thank you, Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein and Van Druten and all your wonderful coworkers. Thank you. Thank you!

Postscript on perfection: the curtain, advertised as 8:35, goes up at 8:35!

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 20, 1944

'I Remember Mama' At the Music Box

By ROBERT GARLAND

PARDON, please, if I go off the deep end about "I Remember Mama." There's no "ifs," no "buts," no doubts whatsoever in connection with John van Druten's latest comedy which Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein fetched last night into the Music Box. It's a hit! A sweet and happy one. Mr. Rodgers, a composer, and Mr. Hammerstein, a librettist, produced Mr. van Druten's dramatization of Kathryn Forbes' "Mama's Bank Account" because—and I quote—they "love it."

Well, I too love it. I love everything about it. And so did last night's premiere congregation. What's more, I've a hunch that future congregations will keep on loving it for many a forthcoming performance in 45th St. If there's any judgment among current showshoppers, they will. For "I Remember Mama" has everything good escapist entertainment should have. Everything good escapist entertainment should have, plus a projection borrowed from the movies and improved upon.

This projection, designed and lighted by George Jenkins, goes from scene to scene—and there're unnumbered unprogrammed interludes—with smoothness, fluidity and despatch. I'll not be one whit surprised if it marks a turning point in the scenic history of the American theatre. I'll not be another whit surprised if, somewhere in the offing, author-director Van Druten had a hand in it.

Touching Trivia

I don't know, I don't care, how closely John van Druten's "I Remember Mama" follows Kathryn Forbes' "Mama's Bank Account." It really makes no difference. As it stands, the new arrival at the Music Box is an enchanting evening in the theatre, an early Twentieth Century narrative in which a Norwegian-American household living in San Francisco has its ups and downs, its health and sickness, its rights and wrongs, its laughs and tears, and, best of all, its mama, its papa and its Uncle Chris.

And its cat, known, not without reason, as Uncle Elizabeth. These, and some sisters, some cousins and some aunts, move through a series of ventures, adventures and misadventures that runs what once was known as the gamut of emotions. Nothing of great moment really happens to Mama and Papa Hansen's family. Nothing of great moment, but everything that is small and warm and human. "I Remember Mama" is made up of a hundred small, unimportant things. Add them up, and you've got a glowing tragi-comedy.

A young girl, Katrin, having her first cup of coffee. A little boy, Arne, being taught lovingly to swear. An old man, Uncle Chris, dying alcoholically. A bashful bridegroom, Mr. Thorkelson, hinting for a dowry. A distinguished novelist, Florence Dana Moorehead, falling for a recipe. A 'teen age youngster, Nels, puffing his first cigarette quite openly in public. Of such trivia a masterpiece is made.

Another Hit

There's no gainsaying the fact that Mady Christians' performance as Mama is the performance of the evening. It is tender, it is true, it is almost miraculously sustaining. To borrow a word from Who's Who in the program, there's something luminous about it. With "Watch on the Rhine," "Hamlet" and "Heartbreak House" firmly in mind, Mama Hansen is Miss Christians' foremost American projection. From the first curtain's rise to the last curtain's fall, she holds the piece together.

The Uncle Chris of Oscar Homolka is beautifully bravura. Never have I seen Mr. Homolka to better advantage, especially in his tender little scene with Arne in the hospital and his ironic big scene with a bottle of whisky on his deathbed. Joan Tetzel achieves a straightforward Hollywoodan performance as the Hansens' literary daughter. The Nels of Marlon Brando is, if he doesn't mind me saying so, charming. Uncle Elizabeth's name is not mentioned in the program. It should be.

So the news is that another hit has come to Broadway, a hit housed in the Music Box with another John van Druten number to the east of it and another Norwegian number to the west. "I Remember Mama" is as heartening a must-see as the current showshop can provide. It is simple, as all really fine things are. And it is flawlessly assembled and projected. Congratulations to all concerned.

NEW YORK POST
October 20, 1944

'I Remember Mama' a Nostalgic Family Portrait by John van Druten

By WILELLA WALDORF

RICHARD Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d have grown so rich writing musical shows that they can now afford to become Broadway producers. Even if they lose their shirts, they can always run around the corner and buy a couple of sweaters out of the profits from "Oklahoma."

The Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein, who may very well be a little sick of musicals, chose as their first producing venture a straight play by John van Druten entitled "I Remember Mama," presented last night at the Music Box.

"I Remember Mama" is adapted from a series of sketches by Kathryn Forbes known as "Mama's Bank Account" and concerning the author's family, a nice, homey group of Norwegian-Americans growing up in San Francisco in the early part of the century.

"I loved the book but I don't see how anybody can make a play out of it," a circulating library hound remarked the other day, and the answer is that Mr. van Druten hasn't made a play out of it in the usual sense of the term. He starts off with Katrin reading from her completed manuscript.

"I remember Mama," she says with a fond little smile, whereupon the lights go up and there's Mady Christians as Mama, surrounded by Papa and the children. Katrin—impersonated by Joan Tetzel—wanders over to take her place in the family group and they proceed to act out her reminiscences, some funny, some touching, some charming, all simple everyday things that most people who ever had a family will recognize in some form or other with an occasional nostalgic smile or twinge and perhaps a tear or two.

The Value of Money

There is nothing strikingly dramatic or especially gripping about "I Remember Mama." Nobody will swoon with anguish. Nobody will actually roll in the aisles laughing. But Mr. van Druten has seen to it that it has quality and a certain quiet distinction that comes from Mama herself and her way of living and bringing up a family.

Papa is just a carpenter and the children are brought up to understand the value of money. At the same time they are made to understand that money isn't everything.

"I would like to be rich like I would like to be ten feet tall," says Mama philosophically. "It's good for some things, not for others."

Mr. van Druten has directed this series of character sketches as simply and as understandingly as they deserve and the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein have provided an attractive production designed by George Jenkins, costumed in the often humorous clothes of the period by Lucinda Ballard.

Miss Christians as Mama

The cast is large and the acting is good. Mady Christians is a perfect choice for Mama. Hers is the seemingly effortless, deeply satisfying performance of an actress whose technique is so expert it never intrudes upon the creation of a character.

Oscar Homolka makes a delightfully rough and rowdy Uncle Chris, the "black" Norwegian who is head of the family, and the family itself is beautifully recreated by Miss Tetzel, Frances Heflin, Carolyn Hummel, Marlon Brando and Richard Bishop. Adrienne Gessner plays Aunt Trina charmingly and there is a merry bit along toward the end by Josephine Brown as a literary celebrity who likes to cook—and eat.

Maybe Mr. van Druten hasn't actually got a play out of "Mama's Bank Account" but he has managed nevertheless to turn it into a very pleasant, nostalgic evening in the theatre. Too bad he didn't get his hands on "Chicken Every Sunday" before a couple of Hollywood funnyboys turned it into a Keystone Komedy.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 20, 1944

"I Remember Mama"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FROM Kathryn Forbes' stories about Mama's legendary bank account, but not legendary character, John van Druten has fashioned a delightful evening for the theatre. He calls it "I Remember Mama," and, like its source, it is about a Norwegian-American family living in San Francisco, one that is complete with problems, children, cats and Uncle Chris. Since Mr. van Druten has the future of Mama's large brood at heart, he has found some wonderful actors to play the various parts and their performances are at the top of the list. Before the new play has run its course, the Music Box should have a bank account like the Federal Treasury's, as should the individual ones of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d, who dropped piano and pencil in order to produce it.

* * *

In the strict sense of the term, "I Remember Mama" cannot be called a play; it is rather a series of scenes about members of the same family. Since Mr. van Druten's other current comedy, "The Voice of the Turtle," is offered practically without actors, there need be no surprise that he can make a charming evening without a formal plot. The character sketches of "I Remember Mama" all are nicely drawn, and they all stand out as living people. Perhaps one or two of the scenes could be trimmed a bit here and there without destroying the mood sought and given by the play, but the objections are minor. On the stage of the Music Box is the history of a simple American family, with its minimized near disasters and its magnified near triumphs.

The play, like the family, is held together by Mama, who fixes everything that goes wrong. Papa is a carpenter, who brings home the money each week and when the children are called in, Mama distributes it — to the butcher, to new shoes, to the rent. One of the daughters is trying to learn to be a writer and specializes in blind musicians living in Paris; one wants to be a veterinarian and specializes in cats and rabbits and wants a horse. The son is to be a doctor. There are three aunts, two married and one wishing to be, and there is Uncle Chris. This last spends most of his life frightening people in order to hide his kindness, and this last also lives with A Woman and drinks from a flask. Mama runs the house with finesse, dignity—and with no mistaking who runs it.

* * *

For Mama, the producers and Mr. van Druten have gone to Mady Christians, who is giving one of her best performances. Mama in her hands is warm and honest; her deceits, such as talk of the bank account which wasn't there, are in the world's best interests. To Oscar Homolka has fallen the part of the limping, blustering Uncle Chris, and he makes that character a very real one. Joan Tetzel has a double part, that of narrator and actress, and goes from one to the other with freshness and charm. Carolyn Hummel is the youngest child, the Dagmar who likes cats, and she is giving a performance which might well be the envy of actresses much older. Frances Heflin is another daughter, Adrienne Gessner is the aunt who wished to begin life at 40 by getting married, and Oswald Marshall has the role of an old actor who boards and reads to the family in the evening.

Due to the type of story, composed as it is of many little incidents, the staging is complicated. There are two side settings and one center one—the living room of Mama's house. The fade-out from one scene to another has its drawback in that it resembles a series of movie flashbacks, and some of the scenes seem

a little short for the effort. But in directing, Mr. van Druten has lost no chance to supply honest little touches to his players or their actions, and the arrangements for scene shifts are perfect. George Jenkins has designed a fine setting for Mama, and Lucinda Ballard has clothed her nicely.

As Uncle Chris was saying, "Iss good."

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 20, 1944

Well Worth Remembering

By HOWARD BARNES

A FOLK drama of heart and substance has has come to the Music Box. "I Remember Mama" is only vaguely defined as a play, but it has theatrical flourish and emotional depth. John Van Druten has adapted the original Kathryn Forbes story of a Norwegian family becoming American in San Francisco when the automobile was a new fangled notion, with more feeling than craft. Fortunately, the subject matter, a superb cast and a brilliant production make this Richard Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein 2d production a signal event of the fall season.

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To Miss Forbes must go the chief credit for a gladsome show. Her Mama, with her pretended bank account, Uncle Chris, three aunts and a flock of kids are real and exciting. A girl's high school graduation becomes a matter of grave and moving import. Uncle Chris's last drink is a stage vignette of distinction and power. Van Druten has recaptured real people miraculously. Mady Christians, Oscar Homolka and the other players have given them stature and strength which must be inherent in the theater's reconstruction of human experience. The form of "I Remember Mama" may be fragmentary. What it contains is very good indeed.

• • •

Miss Christians is, as she should be, the dominant figure in a drama of family existence. Here Mama is a superlative piece of make-believe, holding the offering together even when it threatens to rush off in all directions. Her wise rearing of an immigrant family, her sure knowledge of the eternal verities in living, are communicated directly and triumphantly to an audience. Homolka is so wonderful as Uncle Chris, meanwhile, that he might well have been the central character of the show. His death might well have constituted a period for a rambling continuity.

That the piece rambles is not essentially Van Druten's fault. He had a portrait of family life to project and he has made the family generally vibrant and fascinating. Moreover, he has staged the work with an impeccable sense of theatrical illusion, guiding it to a series of stunning curtains with a magician's skill. Since he and his players have distilled the deep sincerity and warmth of an honest and moving tale, the show is what matters. It has far more quality than such a companion piece as "Life With Father."

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It was too bad, I think, that the author elected to make the author of the book a central character in the play. Joan Tetzel plays the part of the dramatic daughter of Mama with charm and restraint, but there is not much to back up her portrayal. She is far more shadowy than her sister Christine, played beautifully by Frances Heflin, or Dagmar, a rambunctious lover of animals, done to perfection by Carolyn Hummel. There are all sorts of vivid minor characterizations at the Music Box. The point is that Van Druten, Mady Christians and Homolka bring a family clan to life in a colorful period and that that family is very much worth visiting this theatrical season.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 20, 1944

Enter Mama for a Long Visit

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT was thoughtful of the Messrs Rodgers and Hammerstein to house *I Remember Mama* virtually next to *The Voice of the Turtle*, for now John van Druten can post himself midway and watch the lines forming on either side. The play—or, more accurately, the very pleasant evening—he has contrived out of Kathryn Forbes' stories is quite without importance and almost without substance; but it is one of those family chronicles—picturesque, sentimental, humorous, warm and faintly exotic—to which every one can respond in some degree and which a great many people will take to their hearts. Mr. van Druten has just the touch for this kind of thing, as writer, director and man of the theater. He has made something of nothing; and it is one measure of his skill, as it will be one reason for his success, that he has not tried to make too much. Far from forcing a plot on *Mama*, he has not attempted a single large crisis or even a clever curtain. The technique he has employed does have its drawbacks, the small happenings he has chronicled do sometimes run on too long, or seem a little cute or a little too similar; but the general effect is likeable and right.

For this story of a Norwegian family in the San Francisco of perhaps a generation ago adds to homely warmth just enough humor and color to take the kinks out of reality without altogether removing the kernel. It prettifies family life, that is, without arrantly falsifying it; and at its best it is really touching or really funny. The central character is, of course, Mama—practical, forthright, devoted, and endowed with a certain awkward grace that is hard to analyze and harder to resist. The story is told retrospectively, from a corner of the stage, by her daughter Katrin, who grew up to be a successful writer, but while the tale is unfolding is a very young, very self-dramatizing, and very unsuccessful one.

The incidents that Katrin revives are minor enough—the comedy of her old-maid aunt Trina's engagement to an undertaker; the comedy and drama of her little sister Dagmar's mastoid operation; the boisterous appearances of bottle-hitting Uncle Chris; the chloroforming of a cat; the adolescent drama of a school graduation. There is nothing more untoward than Uncle Chris consciously playing the heavy; nothing more villainous than a couple of disagreeable aunts.

The use of Katrin as running commentator results at times in a certain prosiness; the use of many very short scenes on all parts of the stage leads to a curtain jerkiness; the incidents themselves perhaps lack a certain variety of treatment and tone. The second of the two acts, being much longer than the first, became for me a little wearisome, and I could do without the scene of Uncle Chris' death. But even the weakest stretches usually have a saving moment; and Mr. van Druten is to be congratulated for never sacrificing internal humor to external wisecracking or wit.

He is to be congratulated, too, for staging the play so aptly, and for providing it with so good a cast. As Mama, Mady Christians is remarkably sympathetic and ingratiating, an actress who can somehow hold a loose and leisurely play together as she can hold a family. Oscar Homolka gives to Uncle Chris all the rough, noisy, kindly humor that the part demands. Joan Tetzel is a pretty and likeable Katrin; Adrienne Gessner a winningly demure old maid who finds romance; Frances Heflin, Marion Brando and Carolyn Hummel are all good as the children of the family, and Richard Bishop is quietly effective as Papa. George Jenkins has done rather well with the complicated problem of sets, and Lucinda Ballard's costumes add humor and period color.

An awful lot of families will be inspecting Mr. van Druten's for a long time to come.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 20, 1944

'I Remember Mama' Brings New Season the Distinction It Needs

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NOW we have a superior play in "I Remember Mama." It brings excitement to the theatre—the excitement of imagination and skill, of good writing, of good acting, of human warmth and human comedy.

It is placid, for it is the story of a placid life; but it is not weak, for it is the story of a strong life, and to act it there is Mady Christians, who makes it a portrait to keep and cherish. It falters for one or two moments, and there may be some who will object to its episodic form and its lack of "plot"—but it is real theatre, and not just something put on a stage in the hopes of making money.

John van Druten, whose skill as a slick playwright and slick director made "The Voice of the Turtle" the most successful tour de force of many seasons, has set himself a more difficult task in making "I Remember Mama," for the play is an adaptation of a doubtlessly autobiographical novel—Kathryn Forbes' "Mama's Bank Account."

Different Mediums

The literatures of the stage and page are widely different mediums; the one must be short, vivid and confined, while the other has time and space to its advantage. To change one to the other and still maintain the quality of the original work is most difficult. I have not read "Mama's Bank Account," but I feel sure that Mr. van Druten has caught its essence and resourcefully transferred it to the stage. Which is why I say the play brings excitement to the theatre—the excitement of watching work being well done.

Together with the equally imaginative scenic designer, George Jenkins, van Druten has given "I Remember Mama" some of the space and time of the novel form without sacrificing theatrical effectiveness. The story is of Mama, a Norwegian immigrant living in San Francisco in, perhaps, the early 1900's, who manages a numerous family with strength, honesty and kindliness.

She and her husband, a carpenter, have four children and numerous relatives, including a frightening "black Norwegian" uncle. One of the young daughters, Katrin, is bound to become a writer, and it is Katrin who tells the story. And she tells, too, how she finally became a writer instead of a word-goofy child.

Katrin, most charmingly and surely played by Joan Tetzel, tells about herself, and how she wrote her diary, and how in the diary were the family events. As she tells them they come into being, and instead of being the teller she quite easily becomes one of the people in the story by just walking into the scene.

Thrilling Settings

To make this device possible, Jenkins has equipped the Music Box with three revolving stages, two small ones on the side for Katrin's writing-room and other small scenes, and a large one between for the San Francisco house, a hospital and Uncle Chris's ranch. The house is a cross-section, so you can see the street and the sharp hills of San Francisco outside, and it is a thrilling piece of stage designing. So, too, is the ranch in the pines up north.

The story is just a family story — Saroyan's "The Human Comedy" done in a Norwegian accent, perhaps. It is tender and funny in turn, and anxious now and again, and touching when Uncle Chris drinks a final "Skol" with Mama and his mistress before he dies.

It tells of the time when Dagmar had her mastoid operation and Mama sneaked into the ward to see her disguised as a hospital cleaning woman, and how Mama cured the cat after it had a fight, and how she traded her mother's brooch for a "genuine celluloid" dresser set for Katrin's graduation present, and how she swappd a couple of Norwegian recipes for some sound advice on writing with a celebrated woman novelist. Things like that.

Costumes Important

It tells of gruff Uncle Chris, too, and the kindliness that was in him—and here again is a warning, robust performance by Oscar Homolka. All in the cast are excellent, but Adrienne Gessner, Ellen Mahar and Ruth Gates must have hasty mention here as three aunts.

By no means to be overlooked are Lucinda Ballard's costumes, which are essential to the play and which never miss.

"I Remember Mama" is the first production of a new managerial firm, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d of "Oklahoma" renown. It gives them distinction in a new field.

"The Visitor"

Play by Kenneth White; based on the novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau; staged by Herman Shumlin; settings by Howard Bay; presented by Mr. Shumlin at the Henry Miller Theatre, October 17, 1944.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 18, 1944

'The Visitor' Bows At Henry Miller's

By ROBERT GARLAND

LAST night, at Henry Miller's Theatre, "The Visitor" most certainly rang the bell. A psychological mystery melodrama, this new play by Kenneth White, based on a novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau, builds steadily to a thrilling and unexpected climax. And, while building, there are suspense, humor, tragedy and no end of excellent acting by one of Herman Shumlin's hand-picked casts.

I've a hunch that not every playgoer is going to find "The Visitor" as arresting as I did. Last night, several of my neighbors audibly disagreed. But a large majority of the initial congregation was visibly on my side. And, at the fall of the final curtain, the applause was long and loud. As a matter of guesswork, encores may still be going on in one of my favorite Manhattan showshops.

As far as I could see, the denouement came as a complete surprise to even such dyed-in-the-wool first-nighters as Hope Hampton, Jules Brulatour, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Miller and Robert Benchley, who seemed to be sitting all over the lower floor. At any rate, it came as a complete—and entirely rational—surprise to me. And I'm not going to tell!

Is He or Isn't He?

The entire action of "The Visitor"—a title which, when you come to think about it, is generally misleading—takes place in the living room of David Cunningham's house. The time is the present. Judith Cunningham's son, Bud, has been missing for three sorrow-filled years. He is supposed to have been drowned by Joe Willard, a fellow schoolboy of 14. This drowning has not been proved, however.

Suddenly, in Baltimore, of all places, the lost Bud is found. He is working in a diner around the corner from The Hub. He is brought back home by former Police Chief Mack Burrell, who claims the $10,000 reward which has been posted ever since the lad, dead or alive, disappeared. Bud, now 17, acts strangely, remembering some things, not remembering others. His story fails to hang together.

Is he really the long lost Bud? Or is he an imposter? Even his mother begins to wonder (which, incidentally, is the weak spot of the story). The audience wonders right along with her. Now you think he's genuine. Now you think he isn't. And you're never certain until the very end. I found it exciting and suspenseful. So, I think will you!

Fine Young Actor

The cast hand-picked by Mr. Shumlin is, for the most part, flawless. As the is-he-or-isn't-he Bud, Richard Hylton is playing his first on-stage role. You don't realize how good he really is until the surprise finish comes along. Ralph Forbes, now on the Rivoli's screen in "Frenchman's Creek," is as devious a drunkard as you are likely to come upon. His characterization is notable for dastardly detail.

Walter N. Greaza is as he should be as the master of the Cunningham household. And what household! Frances Carson is impressively harassed as the put-upon Mrs. Cunningham. Thomas Chalmers, as the former Chief of Police, takes his hat off in the house. Dorrit Kelton is amusing as the Cunningham's straight-from-the-shoulder maid of all work. The others vary from good to fair-to-middling.

As assuredly staged by Mr. Shumlin against a single setting in Howard Bay's best-foot-forward manner, "The Visitor" makes for a delightfully different evening in the theatre. If you can accept the premise of the play, it will hold and entertain you, just as it held and entertained me last evening. I like it.

THE CAST

Elizabeth	Dorrit Kelton
Walter Dawson	Ralph Forbes
Judith Cunningham	Frances Carson
Ellen Wood	Anna Minot
David Cunningham	Walter N. Greaza
Mack Burrell	Thomas Chalmers
Bud Owen	Richard Hylton
Joe Willard	Will Hare

NEW YORK SUN
October 18, 1944

'The Visitor,' Done at Henry Miller's, Is an Exhausting Play, Badly Acted

By WARD MOREHOUSE

HERMAN SHUMLIN, who has given some distinguished productions to the New York theater over the past ten years, is off his stride with his new one, "The Visitor," brought into Henry Miller's last night. It is diffuse, cluttered and exhausting — and very badly acted.

It's quite possible that casting deficiencies make "The Visitor" seem a palpably bad play. There are several performances that would never have passed in Poli stock. And the play, as acted in 43d street, proves a plodding affair, frequently overpowering in its dullness, and it plunges at the finish into violent melodrama.

"The Visitor," written by Kenneth White and based on the novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau, has been staged by Mr. Shumlin, who has shown from season to season such skill and perception as a director. But this time he misses. And, as a producer, the values that he saw in the script do not come off in the performance.

This new play is all about Bud. Bud and his identity. For three years Bud Owen has been missing, thought to have been drowned after being pushed off a pier by a boyhood playmate. But the body is never recovered. In the first act of "The Visitor" a boy who says he's Bud appears and is taken into the arms of the hysterical mother, who had always believed him alive. But things around the Cunningham household become very peculiar. Is Bud really Bud? The mother begins to have her doubts; opinion of the townspeople is divided. Finally, villainy is outwitted and unmasked and justice is done. Judith Cunningham's tears are now tears of joy. But by this time I suspect nearly every one in last night's audience had ceased to care. It had been a trying evening.

I am inclined toward leniency for Frances Carson. Her performance as Bud's distraught mother is one of unrelieved monotony, but Judith is a character out of old-time melodrama. Walter N. Greaza, usually a favorite with this department, has his troubles with the role of Bud's stepfather, who tries to do both boy and mother in. The part of the stepfather is never one thing or the other.

The strangest performance of all, however, is that contributed by Ralph Forbes in the role of the drunken, thieving and conniving brother of the unhappy Judith. Richard Hylton, a good-looking young actor, does what he can with the part of Bud. The others of this eight-character play are Dorrit Kelton, Anna Minot, Thomas Chalmers and Will Hare. They are also called upon to behave very peculiarly from time to time.

There are moments of suspense in "The Visitor" and it has something of a trick finish, but it must be put down as a tiresome and exasperating play and one in which the acting would have been more appropriate in the old Bowery thrillers of the firm of Sullivan, Harris & Woods.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 18, 1944

Murder's Outing, Part 2

By LEWIS NICHOLS

A NIGHT after "Meet a Body—" had distributed corpses over the stage of the Forrest in the active, or physical, melodrama, "The Visitor" knocked on the door of Henry Miller's last evening to display the semi-psychological melodrama. To be able to say this morning that the intellect had triumphed over brute force would be an agreeable task, but the age of full reason is not yet at hand. The play adapted by Kenneth White from the novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau is no better in its classification than its predecessor was in the other; Broadway still awaits its good melodrama.

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The failure of "The Visitor" lies partly in the script and partly in the acting and direction. The plot of the play concerns a boy who had been thought drowned at the age of 14, but who three years later comes home; the question is whether he is the same boy or an imposter. The earlier parts of "The Visitor" are valid psychological melodrama, as the parents and friends begin to wonder about identity. Then at the end the mood changes and the play shifts to plain old-fashioned melodrama with attempted murder by beer bottle and a contrived ending.

It takes a fairly poor melodrama to be tedious, but "The Visitor" somehow manages even this. A good many of the characters are not believable and they fail to win sympathy. Some of the lines they have to say are stilted, and at the end there is a deep suspicion a good many members of both cast and audience did not quite believe it all. Of the players, Walter N. Greaza, as the stepfather of the boy, is good until the end, when he must change his style and makes a change for the worse. And Ralph Forbes has one of those roles of roistering and evil intoxication, and does everything but contribute a case of delerium tremens to the center of the stage.

Usually Herman Shumlin, who produced and directed, can be counted on for efficient staging, but this time even he has nodded. The players strike attitudes, and too much of the action consists in poor Frances Carson, who plays the mother, running up and down a flight of one of Howard Bay's better stairs. Under his normal standards, Mr. Shumlin would have cut altogether the part of a comedy servant played by Dorrit Kelton, for the role just isn't funny; and he would not permit so many players to take the airs of the Pauline era of melodrama.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 18, 1944

Almost Everybody Has Meemies In Herman Shumlin's 'The Visitor'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ON THE evidence of such of his productions as "The Children's Hour" and "The Little Foxes," Herman Shumlin relishes overwrought, psychotic stage characters. In "The Last Mile" James Bell suffered excruciating mental torment, and even in "The Searching Wind" there are many bees in several bonnets. In his new "The Visitor," which he presented last night at Henry Miller's, Mr. Shumlin has a prime collection of people needing sedatives.

At the end I felt I had been living on benzedrine and black coffee for a week of indulging in the willies. I also felt that some-

how I hadn't liked the drama as well as I should, for basically it is a slick exercise in inducing the jumps. A psychological thriller, so to speak.

Perhaps it is the acting. Shumlin, a painstaking director, can induce in players a proper reticence, but last night almost everybody but Thomas Chalmers and Dorrit Kelton let go.

Son Turns Up—or Does He?

"The Visitor," dramatized by Kenneth White from a novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau, is the story of a mother who has not known for three years whether her boy is alive or dead. She feels he is alive, and now a lad of 17 turns up who says he is her Bud.

This mother is the most beset person on the current stage— worse off, even, than poor Mrs. Manningham in "Angel Srteet." She has headaches, and a drunken brother, and slightly strained relations with her husband, and a maid who ought to have her head bashed in, and a couple of young friends of Bud's who act like fleas on a camp stove.

Murder Schemes, Too

When her beloved Bud comes home her life should be happy again, but it isn't. This boy somehow doesn't seem quite right. He mysteriously wears his hand in a sling and claims he burned it while working as a short-order cook. He forgets little things he should have remembered, like the dog he used to have. He has a false smirking air about him and he keeps needling his stepfather.

By the end of the evening one knows whether Bud is or is he ain't her baby, and one has discovered a couple of diabolical murder plots. Stretches of the middle of the drama are long and repetitive, but it ends with a satisfying rush.

As the mother, Frances Carson gives the role the full treatment, and I found myself getting tired of her plights and plaints, rather than sympathizing. Ralph Forbes enacts the drunk expansively and extravagantly, and toward the end Walter Greaza, as the stepfather, succumbs to the general atmosphere and makes one fear he is going to bust a gasket.

Among those who keep within slightly more restricted bounds are Richard Hylton, whose oddness as Bud is the important part of the plot, and Will Hare, as a young man who for three years has lived under the suspicion of murdering his friend. Chalmers is a solid, soothing comfort as a retired policeman, and Miss Kelton plays the maid so well I wouldn't have her working around my house if she paid me $175 a month and keep.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 18, 1944

A Mysterious Homecoming

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE are good possibilities in the story of *The Visitor*, a psychological mystery that keeps you wondering and that provides a surprise ending which I, for one, did not foresee. But as an actual production, *The Visitor* is no go. Possibly under any circumstances the script itself would not have added up to a full evening's entertainment, for it is very unevenly written and it stretches its material too far. But any faults in the script have been greatly magnified by the production, which is paced too slow, projected too solemnly, stained with theatricality, and in a number of cases very badly acted.

The play concerns a boy who had disappeared under mysterious circumstances when he was 14, and been given up by everybody but his adoring mother for dead. After three years, when he is 17, Bud suddenly returns. The question, almost from his first entrance, is whether it is really Bud, or an impostor. As the story progresses, all kinds of detail—from signet rings to dentist's records—involving the boy, his mother, his stepfather, the girl next door and her beau, serves to deepen the mystery. Both the detail and the denouement are more clever than convincing, which is nothing much against *The Visitor* regarded simply as a yarn; but which does demand that it be treated as merely a yarn.

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But Mr. Shumlin has failed to recognize this. One can partly see why: he has directed serious drama long and excellently; he has not before tried his hand at a simple suspense play. As a result, he has sometimes used his old methods where they are wholly out of place, and at other times jumped to the opposite extreme and indulged in excessive theatricality. When Mr. Shumlin is treating *The Visitor* as pure drama, and going in for studied retardations and the like, he makes it heavy-footed. When he is treating it as melodrama, he makes it lurid. The quiet intensity, the quick twists and thrusts that a play like this requires, are never achieved.

All this is aggravated by much of the acting. Thomas Chalmers does a sturdy job, and Walter N. Greaza a generally restrained one. But Richard Hylton, a newcomer to Broadway, is not a very skilful Bud; Frances Carson emotes very stagily as the mother; Anna Minot is wooden as the young girl; and as a drunken cadger Ralph Forbes comes close to running wild.

It is too bad, for *The Visitor* had the makings of an interesting play.

NEW YORK POST
October 18, 1944

'The Visitor' Starts Slowly but Builds Up to a Surprise Ending

By WILELLA WALDORF

"THE VISITOR," produced by Herman Shumlin last night at Henry Miller's Theatre, is a mystery melodrama that depends even more than most mysteries on a surprise denouement. Its first two acts are mildly tedious, sometimes seem a little silly and concern such debilitating people that the third act had to be uncommonly good to give the evening any punch at all.

Fortunately the final scene ties things up in walloping fashion, especially if you don't know what's going to happen. Anybody who goes around telling innocent playgoers how "The Visitor" ends ought to be given a nice whisky and soda laced with strychnine.

Kenneth White wrote the play from the novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau. Hearing that Mr. Shumlin proposed to bring it to Broadway, this reviewer carefully refrained from reading the book and was very glad of it last night. Mr. White's drama takes its time getting going and when it does get going, proves rather irksome up to the finale, even though it is only too obvious that something pretty screwy is going on in the Cunningham household.

A Prodigal Returns

The plot concerns the return after three years of a runaway youth to his doting mother, his step-father and his friends, including the girl next door and the boy who's lived all this time under suspicion of having murdered his missing pal. The mother and step-father welcome the prodigal home but as time goes on a number of people in town begin to wonder if he isn't an imposter. There's a fortune involved, mother being a fairly wealthy woman, though step-father just runs a lumber-yard.

The piece is economically performed in one set by eight actors, the heaviest burden falling on Frances Carson as the tortured mother. Mother is the sort of woman almost anybody would enjoy socking with a blunt instrument at times, but, looking back on the play as a whole, it strikes us that Miss Carson managed a trying and by no means simple part with considerable skill.

Ralph Forbes as Uncle Walter, the family souse, an insufferably cultured bum who keeps coming around to steal the petty cash, makes a far from pretty picture of brotherly devotion, and there is a girl portrait of a maid-of-all-work by Dorrit Kelton especially dejecting in those troublous times. Walter N. Greaza, Richard Hylton, Will Hare and Anna Minot also contribute to the general bafflement, each in his own peculiar way, and Mr. Shumlin has directed perhaps a trifle over-deliberately but with an eye to building suspense.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 18, 1944

Don't Call Again

By HOWARD BARNES

SINISTER doings are having a field day on Broadway at the moment. Right on the heels of "Meet a Body" has come "The Visitor," calculated to make you suspicious of your kith and kin, your bank and your lawyer. Herman Shumlin has not played for actual murder in his production of the new melodrama at Henry Miller's Theater. It might have been a neat notion to have tossed a couple of corpses around the stage. Kenneth White's adaptation of a novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau is random and soporific where it might have been truly terrifying.

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On second thought, it scarcely seems conceivable that "The Visitor" might have been an exciting entertainment, even with bang-bang killings. The play has been shaped to a psychological pattern of horror but there has been so little moulding in the writing and the acting that killings would only have confused the ultimate issue of the melodrama. "The Visitor" makes some sort of psychopathic sense on the stage. It makes for very little in the way of entertainment.

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Not being able to tell you the plot of this lamentable whodunit, I can only suggest that you watch the fellow of the title rather closely. In him resides the tiny suspense of a ponderous peroration on skullduggery and attempted homicide. Richard Hylton does the assignment rather well, considering its two-dimensional limitations. Only Thomas Chalmers comes through at Henry Miller's with a clean and forthright impersonation of some one involved in hidden and mysterious violence.

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This Chalmers has the skill and artifice to make a rather minor role loom large in the doings of "The Visitor." The other performers play the show cozily, not to say with a slightly hammy touch. Ralph Forbes staggers in and out of scenes as a possible suspect; Frances Carson is just recognizable as the putative victim of the chicanery involved and Walter N. Greaza never seems to be quite sure whether he is a lord of the manor or a blackguard. Howard Bay has thrown up some nice settings for the action; Shumlin has guided it through more intricacies than I care to remember. "The Visitor" leaves one not caring much.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 18, 1944

The Visitor Is Dull, Its Mystery Foggy

By BURTON RASCOE

WHATEVER other first-nighters may tell you, I shouldn't recommend The Visitor, which opened at Henry Miller's Theater last night, as a soporific if you haven't been sleeping well lately. Consult your doctor or try some other remedy. For the author of The Visitor, Kenneth White, has telephonitis. Whenever he is stuck about how to make his play move on, that damned stage telephone rings. Inasmuch as he is hopelessly bogged down from beginning to end, and the play never gets anywhere, he uses the phone a lot and your sleep will be very fitful.

I have seen some bad plays in my time, but I give you my word I never sat through a duller one. Inasmuch as I dare Einstein

himself to tell you what the thing is about until the last five minutes before the final curtain, and inasmuch as this play is a whodunit and drama critics are not allowed to give the plot away, I ask you to have compassion on drama critics, for they suffer much to convey to you the breathless news of the theater.

Hard to Keep Awake

I kept awake by sheer power of will. It's tough, but you can do it if you have the right attitude and stamina. A lady colleague of mine showed signs of weakening at the beginning of the third act and said, "Oh, for a corpse, a green light, a banging door, a siren or a shriek—anything to break the awful monotony of this vacuum!" but I said, "Chin up! No weakening, now!" and like a valiant soldier she sat there until the awful end. (I was on the verge of collapse myself.)

Based on Novel

If you insist upon knowing, The Visitor concerns the introduction into a household of a 17-year-old lad who claims to be the son of that household who was drowned three years before and whose body was supposed to have been swept out by the tide and never recovered. There is an inheritance involved and widespread belief, especially on the part of his wealthy mother, that the boy is an imposter, and he is directed to act so much to convey that impression that if you are awake during the first act you are quite sure he is not. Except for a bit by Dorrit Kelton, a pretty good characterization by Ralph Forbes and some bits by Richard Hylton, the acting was miserably misdirected.

The play is by Kenneth White, based on a novel by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau; the setting was designed by Howard Bay (and very good, too).

It was directed by Herman Shumlin and presented by him with the following members of the cast: Dorrit Kelton, Ralph Forbes, Frances Carson, Anna Minot, Walter N. Greaza, Thomas Chalmers, Richard Hylton and Will Hare. . . There was one good thing about the show last night—Robert Benchley conducting the invisible orchestra while visiting some friends in the front row before the curtain went up. But it won't happen any other night, if any.

"Meet a Body—"

Play by Jane Hinton; staged by William Castle; settings by Willis Knighton; presented by H. Clay Blaney at the Forrest Theatre, October 16, 1944.

THE CAST

Margaret MacGregor.....Ruth McDevitt
Officer McVey.....John Boyd
John MacGregor.....Whitford Kane
Manny Siegelmann.....Al Shean
Everett T. George.....Le Roi Operti
Tim MacGregor.....Paul Potter
Norman Clark.....John McQuade
Horace Craig.....Forrest Orr
Ellen Thorne.....Nan Butler
Carla Thorne.....Helene Ambrose
Doctor Hester.....Dann Malloy
Detective Sergeant Corey.....Harry Gribbon
The Dancer.....Stephen Morrow

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 17, 1944

Meet a Body—Opens Well, Then Drags

By BURTON RASCOE

MEET A BODY—, designated as a "murder-mystery comedy," which opened at the Forrest last night, contains three such lovable stage personalities (Ruth McDevitt, Al Shean and Whitford Kane) that I wish for their sake (and for the sake of other attractive and/or talented members of the cast) that I could report the show is worthy of their fine efforts. It isn't.

Meet a Body— is a whodunit, which opens with a very good first act, amusing and promising. The second and third acts are dull, talky "plantings" and "deductions," entirely without action except of a mechanical kind and involving a species of flub-dub which the editors of the better pulp-paper mystery story magazines started rejecting 20 years ago—the species in which rare poisons and ingenious scientific devices are introduced as the agencies of the murders and are now to be found only in the "comic" strips for kids and in the even less mature publications.

Lots of Tricks

Superimposed upon all this is a sort of Olsen & Johnson technique of trying to whip the audience into a state of excitement.

The theater is kept dark for five minutes each time the curtain goes down, so that people trying to get out during intermission have to make their way in the dark; one of the actors, pursued by a detective, leaps into the orchestra and runs up and down the aisle and back onto the stage before he is plugged by what seemed, last night, to be a cap-pistol; and there are other inanities. . . . I wonder why they didn't have three or four female stooges shrieking and fainting in various parts of the house.

Plenty of Killings

The audience took all this with good-natured aplomb, rather wishing, I think, that the author would forget that mystery hokum and get on with something having exclusively to do with Miss McDevitt, Mr. Shean and Mr. Kane, for they are delights.

The story has to do with the strange assignment given the Macgregor's in their mortuary in the lower East Side of New York. They and their friend and competitor, Manny Siegelmann, who have just $96 among them, are offered $10,000 by a man, who knows he is about to be murdered, to dispose of his body in a certain manner. When you know that, you know that all three of his possible murderers are going to get theirs, and they do, with a couple of extra killings thrown in.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 17, 1944

Six Murders, But No Thrills

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MEET A BODY, which opened the week's drama sessions Monday night, is a murder mystery that blows its top after a fair enough first act. Jane Hinton had a moderately unhackneyed idea for her whodunit, as well as an appropriate setting—an East Side undertaking parlor. But — in spite of having recourse to multiple murder, eerie noises, weird lighting, several renditions of *Danse Macabre* on a wheezy phonograph, considerable chiaroscuro, and a fiend who leaps into the audience—she can't manage any quick thrills or enduring suspense. It can be pretty safely stated that any one who hasn't doped out the misdoings by the end of Act II will never dope out anything in the murder line. Add to this a lot of abysmal dialogue and stock-company acting, and you have a good deal more dregs than drink.

The first act brings to John MacGregor's moribund mortuary a prominent newspaper publisher who announces he is about to be murdered by any of four people, and wants MacGregor to handle his funeral arrangements. He offers the undertaker $10,000 for his services, along with a sealed envelope to be handed to his lawyer; and he makes plain that he doesn't want to be embalmed.

Sure enough he is killed; various folk connected with him arrive at the dead man's prearranged invitation; and soon there is murder, murder everywhere, and not a cop to think. The attending dick is, indeed, a pure dope, as he would have to be if anything needed explaining after the second act curtain. Miss Hinton's trouble is that she has come up with a sound situation instead of a sound story. A further trouble is that she has tried for humor—the play is subtitled a "murder-mystery comedy"—without exhibiting the merest glint thereof.

As the publisher, Le Roi Operti doesn't do too badly; and Whitford Kane and Al Shean, as a pair of undertakers, offer their usual likeable personalities. But they do little in the way of acting, and their fellow-actors do less.

NEW YORK SUN
October 17, 1944

'Meet a Body—,' Presented at Forrest, Fourth-rate Chill and Shudder Play

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THERE are screams in the dark in the new play at the Forrest. Eerie music, too. Bodies tumble out of closets, doors are opened and closed by unseen hands. There are assorted killings and all the conventional trimmings and trappings of the murder-mystery comedy. "Meet a Body—," which opened last night, is fourth-rate chill and shudder stuff.

Jane Hinton wrote this new piece and H. Clay Blaney brought it to town. It begins rather well. A man, one Everett T. George, walks into the presence of two down-on-their-luck morticians and hands over $10,000 for the payment of his own burial. He obligingly falls dead on their doorstep.

Then there are callers at the lower East Side mortuary of the amiable John MacGregor. Several persons interested in the complicated affairs of the late Mr. George are soon dying all over the place. It's not necessary for a playgoer to have seen all the murder mystery plays since "The Bat" to know that the killer wasn't H. Clay Blaney, or even Mrs. Katzenberg. You can make your own guess as to the murderer's identity and everybody seemed to be guessing right last night.

The veteran, Whitford Kane, plays Mortician MacGregor and Al Shean, who has been at this business a long time, is his neighbor and friendly competitor. Le Roi Operti has the audience listening during his first-act farewell. Forrest Orr brings his jocund presence to the proceedings, only to be done away with, and Harry Gribbon is the detective sergeant who bangs about the stage asking a lot of questions.

Willis Knighton's setting is somewhat reminiscent of that of "Arsenic and Old Lace," and Ruth McDevitt, once a participant in that wonderful comedy, is of the cast of the Forrest's new play. The wordless role of The Dancer, a lunatic at large, is done by Stephen Morrow.

"Meet a Body—" or "Murders in a Mor-

tuary" gets screams from the audience, as it was designed to do. But for most of the way it is very ponderous and at the finish it is quite flat.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 17, 1944

'See You in the Morgue

By HOWARD BARNES

THE mortuary background of "Meet A Body," was obviously designed for shrill screams and laughter. It leaves Jane Hinton's so-called "murder-mystery comedy" colder than a dead clam. The pall which has descended on the stage of the Forrest Theater is not occasioned by the several murders in an undertaking establishment which roughly define the action. There are plenty of stiffs in the offering. All that is wanting is a bit of solid dramatic structure, bright dialogue and a genuinely antic approach to the fascinating problem of sudden and violent death.

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The author has taken the ingredients which have made crime stories so popular and mixed them into a hopeless hash. Even with the likable players who appear in this H. Clay Blaney production, it is a tiresome theatrical treatise. Even though I violated my oath of office and told you who the murderer was, it would make little difference in your enjoyment of the show. The point is that the murders are dull in "Meet A Body," the mystery is never neatly solved and the comedy is virtually nonexistent.

• • •

The players deserve sympathy. Whitford Kane, always a reliable trouper, does his best with the role of a lower East Side mortician who is handed $10,000 by an expectant corpse for his funeral and gets delivery in ten minutes. He plays with such quiet authority that he creates the illusion of suspense and excitement. Unfortunately, the script leaves him well out on a limb, as it does most of the other performers.

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Forrest Orr has a few moments of dominant interpretation in a plot which gives the mind plenty of chances to wander. The veteran Al Shean has a vague part as a colleague of the chief funeral parlor boss; Harry Gribbon tries to be funny as a dull-witted cop; Ruth McDevitt is pleasant as a smart-thinking lady in a homicidal puzzle, and Le Roi Operti is rather effective as the fellow who arranges his own funeral. William Castle's staging is downright disappointing after his direction of such films as "The Whistler." Murder is neither terrifying nor funny in "Meet a Body."

NEW YORK POST
October 17, 1944

'Meet a Body—' Multiple Murder in a Mortuary

By WILELLA WALDORF

WHEN a murder-mystery becomes hopelessly involved in worn-out melodramatic cliches, it is the custom along Broadway to add a couple of jokes and call the thing a murder-mystery comedy. Who-dun-it addicts who like to take their murders seriously are then expected to laugh off any number of ineptitudes and still react as if they were sitting before a genuine thriller.

The result often sends the audience home with a let-down feeling on both counts, and so it was last night at the Forrest Theatre where "Meet a Body—" never became sufficiently mysterious to qualify as a good mystery, nor funny enough to be a good comedy.

Originally an idea was there. The scene is MacGregor's Mortuary on the lower East Side. MacGregor is down to his last $6 when in walks a celebrated newspaper publisher with $10,000 to pay for his own funeral. He is, he says, about to be murdered. Next thing you know, he's a corpse.

His lawyer, his secretary and his mistress arrive shortly after, and the author then proceeds to drag in clutching hands, off-stage phonograph music, ghostly green lights, sword-canes, poisoned darts, creaking doors and dumb detectives, winding up the evening with a madman tearing up and down the aisles.

At one point the sinister secretary confronts the sneering lawyer and hisses: "I'll get you for this if it's the last thing I do." It's the last thing he says.

Bodies are strewn all over the stage and the few characters permitted to survive kindly aid the management from time to time by turning off the lights and groping around in the dark while the eerie green light shines across the publisher's corpse in the next room and huge shadows loom up for shrieking purposes.

Whitford Kane, Al Shean, Forrest Orr and Harry Gribbon are among those who try to make something out of all the hullabaloo, but it's no use, and they aren't helped very much by the direction, which is as erratic as the play.

Elementary, my dear Watson. In fact, downright juvenile.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 17, 1944

Lots of Bodies in 'Meet a Body—' But Audience Gets Rigor Mortis

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ONE trouble with "Meet a Body—" is that you meet so many uninteresting corpses. Another is that those who are left alive on the stage of the Forrest Theatre can hardly be told from the stiffs, so far as personal attention warrants. The result is a comedy melodrama which garners few laughs and fewer shudders.

A rich nut, a lawyer, a subversive radical, a tough actress and a cop become deceased in the precints of an undertaking parlor, and as a last-minute attraction an extra character gets himself good and shot after trying to escape through the audience up the right aisle.

Such events should make a cheery evening in the theatre, but Jane Hinton, the author, has committed the mistake of not making you care who lives or who dies. Some of her people have interesting characteristics and the actors make the most of them, but this isn't quite enough. And when a supposed corpse breathes heavily it spoils, to coin a phrase, the illusion.

Idea Is All Right

As an idea "Meet a Body—" is okay. A man walks into a undertaking parlor, makes a deal for a funeral, pays $10,000 and then announces that he is to become the corpse. He is going to be murdered, and, sure enough, his remains fall in the front door a little while after he has left the place.

Business now of introducing the lawyer, the radical, etc., and the inevitable soldier on furlough and the inevitable girl to go with the soldier, even though girl and soldier have nothing whatever to do with the plot. Business, too, of creaking doors, silhouettes in the dark and the dumb detective. I tried hard to have more fun than I did, for I am a sucker for a whodunit.

Whitford Kane plays a Scottish undertaker with the usual Kane Irish brogue. Al Shean is his pal, a Jewish undertaker from nearby. When Le Roi Operti is on the stage things are pretty interesting, but unfortunately he's the first one to meet his maker. Harry Gribbon is the traditional dumb detective and he gives the role a Gribbon touch which is always funny.

The setting is a good one by Willis Knighton. William Castle, of Hollywood, directed what there was to direct, but there wasn't enough of it.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 17, 1944

Murder's Outing

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE theatre waited for the first frost of the season to start rivers of warm blood flowing through Broadway; H. Clay Blaney was the guilty party and "Meet a Body—" was the play. It opened last evening at the Forrest, and it was not long before the use of the singular, "body," clearly became one of the season's major understatements. For in writing her new murder-mystery-comedy, Jane Hinton has gone under the theory that two murders are better than one, and that five are better than two, and that actors never are so satisfactory as when they are corpses tumbling through opened doors to the half-light of a melodrama's stage. Not always is the theory successful; in this case, for example, it is not.

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"Meet a Body—" gets off to a promising start, and its first act is rapid and contains suspense and enough sandpaper to start the desirable nervous shudder. After the first act, however, Miss Hinton goes in for mass murder the perpetrators of which are not crafty enough in disguise; it also goes in for talkiness and a good deal of standing around. Having an idea that in better circumstances could turn an audience's hair gray as it waited in the gloom, the author has failed to sustain her initial speed, and a cast composed in the main of pleasant-enough people is left without much to work with. "Meet a Body—" disintegrates into the usual dim cop, only dimmer than most, solving a series of crimes long after the audience has solved them.

The Forrest's carnage starts with a publisher's arrival at an undertaking establishment with $10,000 and orders for his own funeral, which he says is to be soon. It is. On the scene come various persons who may or may not be guilty, various policemen to find out the answers if they can, background music in the form of the "Dance Macabre" and jokes about the undertaking business. There also is love interest, which is pretty silly. Al Shean and Whitford Kane are likable as a pair of neighborhood undertakers, to whom fall this $10,000 plum; Forrest Orr is an attorney and Harry Gribbon is the cop. The final dead include a good many of the publisher's associates plus some innocent bystanders, and it may be the abnormally high mortality rate becomes a little ridiculous before the end. One clean-cut murder would be better; corpses clutter stages so.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 17, 1944

'Meet a Body' Opens At Forrest Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

WHEN originally announced in the public prints, last night's arrival at the Forrest Theatre was known as "If a Body." Now, as you may have heard, "Meet a Body" is its name. But, if you ask me, "Coming Through the Corn" is a more fitting title. For if a single bit of whodunit hokum has been omitted from its context, from "The Bat" through "The Gorilla" to "Ramshackle Inn", the author—one of the Hollywood Hintons—just didn't happen to think of it.

The not-too-particular who-dunit that has found its way into West 49th Street has me completely baffled. Having sat wide-eyed and alert through every long last word of it, I've not the least idea who killed Cock Robin. Or how! Or why! Even if I were a guy who gives murder mystery plots away, "Meet a Body" would be safe in my hands. I can't make heads or tails of it, although I wouldn't be surprised if the cadaver killed itself just to make things harder.

When alive and kicking, that cadaver was

a newspaper publisher by the name of Everett T. George. And, from what they tell me, there's no telling what a newspaper publisher will do.

Merry Mortuary

Let me take time to tell you that Everett T. George is well aware that he is about to be bumped off by any one of four faithful Fourth Estate retainers. This quaint quartet—two ladies and two, if I may say so, gentlemen—just dearly love their publisher. There's nothing they wouldn't do for him, even if it kills him. Especially the Norman Clark who is a columnist. True to type, Norman is the most vindictive of the four. And he resembles Westbrook Pegler.

So it comes about that Everett T. George walks into the living-room of MacGregor's Mortuary on the lower East Side of New York to arrange his own laying-out and burial. Everything must be so—and so—and so. Down to the dreariest detail. He must not be embalmed. His hands must not be crossed. He must be dressed in the suit he brings with him, made up with his own cosmetics.

All this, and much that I have happily forgotten, is told and retold with gruesome gayety. Maybe it was supposed to be funny. Anything for a laugh, as one of the characters remarked.

Meet the Cast

A not undistinguished cast works hard at its various assignments. Best of the lot is Le Roi Operti, who, as Everett T. George, is very much alive for one act and very much a-dead for two. Frankly, I'm of the opinion that he talks himself to death before the first act curtain. Ruth McDevitt indulges in an excellent imitation of Josephine Hull in "Arsenic and Old Lace". No wonder! She was seen and heard as Abby Brewster for almost a year on what is known as Broadway.

Whitford Kane, the eternal Grave Digger in Hamlet", is now a mortician—undertaker to me—in "Meet a Body." Harry Gribbon lives down to Hollywood as a detective with his hat on. Forrest Orr is an excellent over-actor as a gimpy double-crossing lawyer. John McQuade is a canny columnist. Paul Potter, as a Marine who lands and has the situation well in hand, is a chap to keep your eyes on. Stephen Morrow, as The Dancer, jumps out into the audience and jumps right back again . . .

William Castle has directed unskilfully in a setting by Willis Knighton, which does everything it can to trip up the self-styled murder mystery comedy. Maybe I'm wrong about the title. On second thought, "This is Murder" may be the proper designation.

"Bloomer Girl"

Musical play, with music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by E. Y. Harburg; book by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy; based on a play by Lilith and Dan James; staged by Mr. Harburg; dances by Agnes DeMille; book directed by William Schorr; Settings by Lemuel Ayres; presented by John C. Wilson, in association with Nat Goldstone, at the Shubert Theatre, October 5, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 6, 1944

Bewitching!

By HOWARD BARNES

THE theater exercised its prerogative in magnificent fashion last evening. "Bloomer Girl," which came to the Shubert Theater, is a show of magical delight. In the loose framework of a musical, it blends songs, dancing, drama and spectacle in an enchanting and prodigal entertainment. Not since the happy advent of "Oklahoma!" has there been such cause for rejoicing. With a jubilant gesture, it wipes away the disappointments of the early season and restores the stage to its proud estate. The Harold Arlen score, the choreography of Agnes de Mille, the costumes of Miles White and the infinitely modulated performing of the company headed by Celeste Holm and Joan McCracken make for what might well be termed an event.

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It is not easy to define the particular charm of "Bloomer Girl." The book is no great shakes, as it describes a feminist uprising in Cicero Falls in 1861, but it is pleasantly unpretentious. What matters is that it gives the cues for a dazzling series of ballets, song numbers and the vignettes which make American musical comedy so wonderful when music and drama are happily married. The Arlen tunes are coupled with brilliant lyrics by E. Y. Harburg, are sung and danced with brilliant effect and set off in period settings and dresses which are nothing short of bewitching. Thanks to Miss deMille's ballets one can even find considerable significance in the work. At any rate, it is a stunning show.

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Celeste Holm, who once graced "Oklahoma!" with her presence, does the chief performing in the new Forty-fourth Street hit and she does it to perfection. As the recalcitrant daughter of a hoop skirt manufacturer in an Eastern manufacturing town, who falls in love with a Southerner while helping the underground railway to spring slaves, she has a part which demands great versatility. Whether she is flaunting bloomers, making love, singing or clowning, she is triumphant. John C. Wilson, the producer of "Bloomer Girl," thought she could carry a big musical. She does.

At the same time, she has not inconsiderable aid in making the offering a thing of gaiety and beauty. Miss McCracken dances and sings with arch splendor in the role of the hoop skirt manufacturer's maid of all work. Margaret Douglass is properly belligerent as Dolly Bloomer, who sets a staid town on its ear on the eve of the Civil War; Matt Briggs is fine as the industrialist; Mabel Taliaferro creates an engaging portrait of an unemancipated mother; David Brooks is a dashing hero and Dooley Wilson chants and performs with gusto as an escaped slave.

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There are many more memorable performances in "Bloomer Girl." Richard Huey delivers "I Got a Song" so fetchingly that it might have been reprised a dozen times. Lidija Franklin, James Mitchell and the other dancers execute a waltz, a style show ballet and the Civil War tableau which has been so eloquently staged by Miss deMille for the finale. Meanwhile, John Call and a lot of other expert players contribute to a miraculous melange. "The Eagle and Me," "When the Boys Come Home" and "I Got a Song" would be outstanding numbers in any show. There are a dozen other Arlen tunes of comparable quality, if that may give you a rough notion of the production's munificence.

The decor is not the least of the riches at the Shubert. White has gone to town with period costumes; Lemuel Ayers has backed them up with simple and imaginative settings and backdrops. Wilson has not been stingy with "Bloomer Girl." With the sure collaboration of fine craftsmen, he has given the theater exactly what it needed and an entertainment to remember for a long, long time.

THE CAST

Serena	Mabel Taliaferro
Octavia	Pamela Randell
Lydia	Claudia Jordan
Julia	Toni Hart
Phoebe	Carol MacFarlane
Delia	Nancy Douglass
Daisy	Joan McCracken
Horatio	Matt Briggs
Gus	John Call
Evelina	Celeste Holm
Joshua Dingle	Robert Lyon
Herman Brasher	William Bender
Ebenezer Mimms	Joe E. Marks
Wilfred Thrush	Vaughn Trinnier
Hiram Crump	Dan Gallagher
Dolly	Margaret Douglass
Jeff Calhoun	David Brooks
Paula	Lee Barrie
Prudence	Eleanor Jones
Hetty	Arlene Anderson
Betty	Eleanor Winter
Hamilton Calhoun	Blaine Cordner
Pompey	Dooley Wilson
Sheriff Quimby	Charles Howard
1st Deputy	John Byrd
2d Deputy	Joseph Florestano
3d Deputy	Ralph Sassano
Augustus	Hubert Dilworth
Alexander	Richard Huey
State Official	John Byrd
Governor Newton	Butler Hixon

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 6, 1944

Bloomer Girl Won't Edge Out Oklahoma!

By BURTON RASCOE

BLOOMER GIRL, a musical by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, arrived at the Shubert last night after making such a hit in Philadelphia that the advance sale on the New York run has already taken on phenomenal proportions and amid such fanfare that people with tickets had to battle their way into the theater through the worst jam of autograph hounds and rubbernecks I ever saw at an opening night. Society and notables from stage and screen were there in force. And it was a dressy audience, black ties prevailing among the men and dinner gowns among the women.

I sincerely wish I could say the show was equal to the occasion, but I can't; and those among you who set any store by my opinion must take my word for it that it is a very lovely spectacle with Celeste Holm in it and very little else. If you go there not expecting too much, you will come away satisfied, but if you go there expecting another Oklahoma! (as it has been heralded to be) you will come away, I am afraid, feeling that you have been badly misled. Bloomer Girl is not even a second Song of Norway. It is, on the whole, probably the least entertaining musical in town.

Music Deficient.

It's great lack is in music and lyrics of quality and distinction. There is only one melody of warmth and spirit—Sunday in Cicero Falls; and, although there are two hit songs, only one of them—I Got a Song, a Negro work song, superbly rendered by Richard Huey — has any originality; the other — T'morra, T'morra, recited rather than sung by Joan McCracken — seems like a weak try at doing something similar to Ado Annie's I cain't Say No In Oklahoma! The words of this song are amusing, but there is no genuine inspiration in it and it does not flow out of character as do the songs in Oklahoma. Besides, Miss McCracken is cute, but she was so damned busy being cute last night that (to me) she was irritating.

On the credit side there is, first of all, Celeste Holm. She is lovelier to look at than ever, but her charm is something greater than mere beauty; she is one of the few natural comediennes we have and a consummate artist, with intelligence as well as grace and spirit. As everyone knows, of course, she has no singing voice to speak of (last night she put David Brooks, who can sing, to a

stiff test in a duet by apparently singing a different tune from the one he was singing), but she doesn't need to sing—she can recite a song better than most good singers can sing it. Her solo material in Bloomer Girl is third rate and she is cramped by it.

Well Produced.

On the credit side, too, there are the costumes by Miles White, who spreads himself in the hoop skirt numbers; the settings by Lemuel Ayres; a good orchestra (for what it has to play) under the direction of Leon Leonardi; some good comical bits by Charles Howard; a waltz danced beautifully by Lidija Franklin and James Mitchell; an effective choreographic number depicting the return of civil war survivors and their gradually forgetting the hardships and awakening to a new joy in life; the endearing personality of the fat and talented Richard Huey; a good characterization by Margaret Douglass; and, finally, a small but very pretty chorus.

The book is awful; it doesn't even develop a love interest; and the comic touches are few and far between. It tells the story of the revolt in 1861 of the youngest and loveliest of the daughters of Horatio Applegate, the hoopskirt monopolist, not only against such cumbersome dresses but against the slavery of women to men which the dresses typified, and of her joining with Dolly Bloomer's crusade for pants and votes for women and the emancipation of the Negro slaves.

The show is, I repeat, all right if you don't expect too much.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 6, 1944

"Bloomer Girl"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

PRECEDED by approximately as much fanfare as the elections, "Bloomer Girl" moved into the Shubert last evening. Let the elections be as satisfactory. Beautiful to look upon, with a good score and bright lyrics and an engaging cast to sing them, the town's newest musical show is what the town has been awaiting for some time. Nothing has been spared to make of "Bloomer Girl" one of the better evenings in the Broadway theatre and, since care calls forth its own reward, the new show is just that. It probably will be resident on Forty-fourth Street until the hoop skirts, in the usual cycle of women's fashions, come back again. That won't be tomorrow.

* * *

The careful joining of talents is "Bloomer Girl's" great asset. Harold Arlen has written a generally excellent score, with E. Y. Harburg to supply concise and witty lyrics. Celeste Holm has come forth from another fair show, "Oklahoma!", to sing some of them, and David Brooks has left the Philadelphia Opera to sing others. Joan McCracken, who is used to dancing to the steps of Agnes de Mille, is doing so once more, and in addition has become a comedienne of great charm and a raucous, spellbinding voice. There are one or two good ballets, a pageant, part of an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" show, wonderful settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers and Miles White—in fact, the contents of the top drawer. There also is a book, but perhaps this is not the time to go into that, since the book is not the show's most sturdy beam.

With Russell Bennett to supply the flutes and other necessities of orchestration, Mr. Arlen has turned out a score which is eminently serviceable and contains a number of items which will go on to be bothersome by radio. "Evelina," as sung by Miss Holm and Mr. Brooks, is one; "When the Boys Come Home"; "The Eagle and Me"—the property of Dooley Wilson; and "I Got a Song" are others. This last, in the form of a rapid-fire ballad, is sung by Richard Huey, who probably weighs three hundred pounds, is very dark, indeed, and makes of his own particular number the great moment in the show. Mr. Huey has songs for all occasions—trains, women, bullfrogs, freedom — and goes on through the list, to Mr. Harburg's best lyrics.

Miss McCracken's entry into the legitimate field is an important feature of "Bloomer Girl." She is all over the stage, as dancer, as harsh-shouting singer of "T'morra' T'morra,'" as Topsy in what can be called the play within a play, just like Shakespeare, and she is pretty wonderful. Miss Holm is attractive in the leading role, but sometimes cannot be fully heard when at work on the songs. Mr. Brooks has an amiable stage presence, as though he had been on Broadway always, and an easy voice. Margaret Douglass gives another of her brisk portraits as the Dolly Bloomer who is trying to free women generally, and especially to get them out of hoop skirts; and Matt Briggs is properly pompous as the manufacturer of hoops and the father of daughters.

The credit for the brave thought of dressing a whole musical comedy in hoop skirts probably goes to Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, who wrote the book from a play by Lilith and Dan James. The story is about the youngest daughter of the hoop king, who sides with her aunt, the bloomer queen, in the pursuit of freedom. Since the time is 1861, the emancipation of women can be stretched to include the emancipation of slaves, which gives the chance for a Tom show and parade, and gives Miss de Mille the chance for a good "Civil War Ballet," the main dancers being Lidija Franklin and James Mitchell. The freedom-for-women motif supplies another dance, about what grandmother used to do, which shows Miss McCracken at her best.

And there is much more. The opening of the second act is a colorful fifteen minutes of church parade, Tom show parade, arrest and chaos under the name of "Sunday in Cicero Falls." A male group gives a song, modeled on the opera of the old barber shop quartet and having to do with the "Farmer's Daughter." Mr. Harburg shows with "Bloomer Girl" that he is not only a lyricist but an excellent director of a musical show. It has pace and rhythm, and while some sections of the dialogue in the first act are too long, it flows along smoothly. In short, "Bloomer Girl" is a good show, and if the hoops are to come back, the Shubert Theatre is the place to see the newest and best styles.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 6, 1944

'Bloomer Girl' Bows At Shubert Theatre

By JIM O'CONNOR

"BLOOMER GIRL," which blossomed in its pre-Broadway tryout in Philadelphia, burst into full bloom last night at the Shubert Theatre. Seldom has a play received such an enthusiastic welcome. They could be taking curtain calls yet.

Today the fabulous John C. Wilson musical basks in the sunshine of popular approval.

"Oklahoma!" will now have to move over and make room for "Bloomer Girl," but "Oklahoma!" can take credit for providing the stars who have made "Bloomer Girl" the latest sensation on Broadway. They are Joan McCracken, Agnes deMille and Celeste Holm.

The newcomer is fresh, vigorous, radiant, enchanting and thoroughly American. It is superior entertainment, and lives up to expectations—quite an accomplishment in itself.

Harold ("Stormy Weather") Arlen composed the music, which is melodious. E. Y. ("Brother Can You Spare a Dime") Harburg wrote the lyrics, which are really lyrical. Agnes deMille did the choreography, which is meaningful. Miles White designed the costumes, which are gorgeous. And Lemuel Ayers, of Hollywood, created the settings, which are glowing.

Has Young Ideas

There you have the background against which the performers present this story of Dolly Bloomer, a Cicero Falls old maid with young ideas. Said young ideas included the wearing of pantelettes (bloomers), instead of hoopskirts. This all happened in 1861, before you or I were born.

Pantelettes are loose trousers fastened at the ankles. Dolly should see the tight slacks sported by maidens of 1944.

Individual honors in "Bloomer Girl" are captured by captivating Joan McCracken, the cute little girl who fell down so often in "Oklahoma!". Joan, a delightful dancing comedienne, doesn't fall down in "Bloomer Girl," although she lets her bloomers fall down and does an 1861 striptease that "brings down the house." Her song, "T'morra T'morra," is a rare treat.

As a musical comedy, "Bloomer Girl" puts more accent on the musical than on the comedy. Graceful dancing rates a close second.

Among the catchy songs which all New York will soon be humming and whistling are "Right as the Rain," "Sunday in Cicero Falls," "Welcome Hinges," "Evelina," "The Eagle and Me" and "Farmer's Daughter."

Formerly a dramatic actress and later a comedienne, Celeste Holm sings her first romantic role as "Evelina." Her voice is soft and sweet, but does not carry well over the footlights. Perhaps the excellent orchestra, under the baton of Leon Leonardi, drowns it out.

However, Celeste more than scores with her acting ability, charm and personality. David Brooks, of the Philadelphia Opera Company, has the leading male singing role. And Margaret Douglass as Dolly does better than all right by the old girl.

The ballets by deMille are purposeful and actually fit into the story—especially the Civil War ballet and the hoopskirt style show led by Lidija Franklin, James Mitchell and Emy St. Just.

But not even "Bloomer Girl" has everything. The libretto by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy does not keep pace with the tempo of the production. They based their book on the play by Lilith and Dan James

Lighting effects by Lemuel Ayers are particularly striking. And the chorus can sing as well as dance.

A novelty number, "I Got a Song," by Richard Huey, Hubert Dilworth and Dooley Wilson got one of the few encores allowed.

The relatively small part of "Serena" is played well by Mabel Taliaferro. Remember her in "Polly of the Circus?" Or can you remember your stage that far back?

The issue of slavery, the North vs. the South, was "fit" all over again—in Civil War style—in "Bloomer Girl." But they did it with music and dancing. It was a pleasure. And when the boys came marching home, it was in Zouave uniforms—red bloomers, no less!

John C. Wilson produced the extravaganza in two acts and ten scenes in association with Nat Goldstone and he did it with skill and craftsmanship.

"Bloomer Girl" is a big, beautiful, bouncing Broadway hit!

THE NEW YORK SUN
October 6, 1944

'Bloomer Girl,' New Musical, Has Class and Charm— It's a Hit at the Shubert

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE news today from the Broadway tributary called 44th street is that the town has a big new new hit. It's "Bloomer Girl," a warm, melodious and beautiful song-and-dance show that took over the stage of the Sam S. Shubert Theater last night and delighed its first New York audience.

Here's a musical play of the long ago, of the America that used to be, of life in Cicero Falls in the spring of '61. The production has style and tremendous charm. The score is excellent. The costumes are unbelievably lovely. The company is first rate. "Bloomer Girl" gives a much-needed lift to the struggling theatrical season.

The book of the Shubert's new show is ambling and a little more humor wouldn't hurt. But the score is one of distinction and the music, along with the beauty of the production, will put "Bloomer Girl" in the hit class and will keep it there. There is an enchanting number, "Sunday in Cicero Falls," that comes at the beginning of the second act. And there are others that are outstanding — "Evalina," "The Eagle and Me," "I Got a Song" and "When the Boys Come Home."

"Bloomer Girl" takes you back to the town of Cicero Falls, a small Eastern manufacturing center, at the time of the civil war and it tells of the rebellion of the bloomer girls, of the conflict between hoop skirt manufacturers and the shocking pioneers in pantalettes. The book writers, Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, don't stop there. They take up various phases of the beginning of women's fight for emancipation. They bring in a fugitive slave, an Uncle Tom show, wartime excitement and a romance between the lovely Evalina and Jefferson Lightfoot Calhoun, from out of Kentucky and mighty proud of it.

Harold Arlen's score is probably his best job for Broadway to date. E. Y. Harburg has written some excellent lyrics and has done the staging of the production. Agnes deMille has contributed an exciting and imaginative civil war ballet and Lemuel Ayers, with the scenery and lighting, and Miles White, with the costumes, have excelled themselves.

Two graduates of "Oklahoma" take new honors in "Bloomer Girl"—Celeste Holm and Joan McCracken. Miss Holm, quite at ease in both hoop skirts and bloomers, is a lovely Evalina. Miss McCracken does wonderfully with her numbers—"T'morra" and "I Never Was Born." David Brooks is a manly hero with a Kentucky drawl, who has his way with a song. Margaret Douglass carries a lot of the book along as the redoubtable Dolly Bloomer. Matt Briggs is very much in the picture and the spirit of the times as the hoop skirt king. Richard Huey, with Dooley Wilson and Hubert Dilworth, renders the stirring "I Got a Song." And then there's Mabel Taliaferro, giving the appearance that it was really only the other day that playgoers of this very town were seeing her in "Springtime." . . . And in "Polly of the Circus"

The inevitable comparison will be made—how does "Bloomer Girl" fare alongside of "Oklahoma!" Is it another "Oklahoma"? I wouldn't know. Perhaps nothing ever will be. But I do know that this new show has charm and class on its own account and that playgoers will be battling to spend their money at the box office of the Shubert.

John C. Wilson, who produced "Bloomer Girl" in association with Nat Goldstone, can take a bow. They both can take a bow or two, if need be. Cicero Falls has come to 44th Street and there'll be singing of Sunday on the village green for many months to come.

NEW YORK POST
October 6, 1944

'Bloomer Girl' a New Hit That Misses Now and Then

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE fabulous success of "Oklahoma!" was bound to have its effect on the Broadway musical market. Let's face it. We are in for several seasons of intensely old-fashioned quaintness, most of it with choreography by Agnes deMille.

"Bloomer Girl," the first of what is sure to be a long series of elaborately cute period pieces, arrived last night at the Shubert Theatre. It was a box-office success before it moved in, ecstatic tidings of its greatness having drifted in from the out-of-town tryout.

Tickets are already being booked for the Christmas matinee of 1946, according to report, and although it just reached Broadway last night, an old gentleman who lives in Rittenhouse Square has already seen it fourteen times and is convinced we're still fighting the Civil War.

Although it is our custom to stick our fingers in our ears whenever somebody comes around with advance testimonials about forthcoming shows, some of the "Bloomer Girl" ballyhoo inevitably seeped in, and so we clawed our way into the Shubert last night in hopeful mood, all ready for a bang-up evening.

Lovely to Look At

It was all of 9:20 before it dawned upon us that the show was taking an unconscionably long time getting started, and at least half an hour later before we realized that it had been going on for some time with nothing to recommend it beyond some of the most luscious costumes Miles White ever designed paraded before a series of charming 1861 sets by Lemuel Ayers.

Except for a few moments devoted to the pantomomic dancing of Joan McCracken, who used to be in "Oklahoma!", directed by Agnes deMille, who did the choreography in Oklahoma!", the long first act of "Bloomer Girl" is a big, beautiful bore.

The second act is better, partly because it is shorter, but also because it is livelier and the principals don't try to sing so much. Some colored boys named Richard Huey, Hubert Dilworth and Dooley Wilson whooped it up for a spell in the Cicero Falls jail with "I Got a Song" and there was a delightful opening number to this act entitled "Sunday in Cicero Falls" that would have been better if there had been less of it. Sunday can't last that long, even in Cicero Falls.

Sumter Is Fired Upon

Scenes from "Uncle Tom's Cabin" were in progress when Fort Sumter was fired upon, just in time for Agnes deMille to fling her whole troupe of dancers into a Civil War Ballet staged from the tragic-women-waiting-for-their-men-to-return angle. The dancers are generally good and some of them are rather special, notably Lidija Franklin, a fascinating creature, plus the above-mentioned Miss McCracken, who is a clever dancing comedienne, but who definitely should not try to sing.

Why so much attention should be paid to the quality of the dancers in shows like "Bloomer Girl" and so little to the quality of the singers is a Broadway mystery that becomes more abstruse from season to season.

The "book" is based on a play—probably a very poor play—which may possibly be the reason so many "dramatic" actors and actresses are in it. Unfortunately they are called upon not only to act but to sing Harold Arlen's songs. If we had composed "Bloomer Girl" and had to listen to it "sung" as it was "sung" last night, we'd be discovered out in Shubert Alley this morning riddled by machine-gun bullets fired by our own hand.

Just because Celeste Holm shouted something at the top of her lungs in "Oklahoma!" (there's that thing cropping up again) is no reason for anybody to assume that she can carry a score like Arlen's for "Bloomer Girl," and it's a pity, for she's a lovely person and a nice actress. For Heaven's sake, Miss Holm, go back to the drama where you belong. You're killing us.

Too bad hardly anybody but the leading man, David Brooks, and some of the chorus, have any voices at all. Hard on Arlen and none too easy on E. Y. Harburg, whose lyrics are often very amusing, when you can hear them.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 6, 1944

'Bloomer Girl,' a Bountiful Hit, Has Got a Song— and Many More

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"BLOOMER GIRL," which has been anticipated almost as feverishly as was repeal, is a big, lovely, perfectly tasteful and surprisingly solemn musical show with some captivating performers and some wonderful songs.

Stars of the evening are, in order, Harold Arlen, who wrote the tunes; Joan McCracken, the dancing imp; Celeste Holm, the "Cain't Say No" girl from "Oklahoma"; E. Y. Harburg, who wrote the lyrics and staged the show, and Agnes deMille, who designed the dances.

Crowding these are many more . . . Two negroes, Dooley Wilson and Richard Huey, to whom fall two of the best songs of many seasons—"The Eagle and Me" and "I Got a Song." Miles White, whose costumes should make women jump right into the biggest hoopskirts they can get made. Lemuel Ayers, whose settings are splendid.

Plenty of Book.

"Bloomer Girl" has enough book to equip a couple of operettas, and, although there are many moments of humor in it and some funny performers, I must confess I was disappointed in its occasional ponderous lack of pace. And when Miss deMille's otherwise delightful dancers chose to fight the whole darn Civil War in ten minutes I got downright restless.

The story is that of Dolly Bloomer, the woman's rights pioneer who rebelled at hoop skirts and invented a costume which undoubtedly served its liberative purpose but isn't to modern eyes precisely fetching. One of her converts is a niece, Evelina Bloomer, one of the six daughters of a tycoon who runs a great hoop skirt factory in Cicero Falls. Miss Holm is Evelina, and mighty pretty as she is wooed by and quarrels with a gentleman from Kentucky.

Since the time is 1861, it gives the plot authors, Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, plenty of room not only for nostalgia, hoop skirts, freedom for women and fine gents' furnishings, but also for underground railroads, runaway slaves and a tabloid production of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," with Miss McCracken as Topsy and a deMille doll dancing her way across Eliza's ice. John C. Wilson, the producer, has had plenty of money for all this, so you get an idea why it's a big, long show.

At another time we can go into more of the details and hit the high spots now. There isn't a bad or dull song in the whole Arlen-Harburg collection, and many are standouts of varying types. "When the Boys Come Home" a chorus number; "Welcome Hinges" and "Farmer's Daughter," comedy pieces for a men's chorus; "Evelina," a tuneful love potion; the rousing "Eagle and Me," and "I Got a Song."

Strip Tease in Hoops.

Miss McCracken puts her end of the show in her pantalettes pocket with "T'morra T'morra," a comic lament about the preferable benefits of today, in which she dances a hilarious strip tease as it might have been done in 1861 if anybody then had had the wit to think it up.

Miss Holm enjoyably sings "It Was Good Enough for Grandma" as well as a sweet, short lullaby. The opening scene of the second act, "Sunday in Cicero Falls," is the finest combination of spectacle, movement and music I have seen since Irving Berlin's and Hassard Short's Rotogravure Page, better known as the Easter Parade number.

Mr. Wilson's cast is excellent, from the principals and the dancers to the choristers. Matt Briggs is properly stuffy as the hoop skirt hot shot, David Brooks makes highly acceptable and melodious love to Miss Holm, Margaret Douglass is a dry and determined Dolly Bloomer (who runs her propaganda newspaper shop in the town's fanciest former bordello), and Mabel Taliaferro makes a very sweet mother of a female sextet. Charles Howard, playing a typically frustrated musical comedy sheriff, manages to do it in a new and funny way.

And just you wait until you hear "The Eagle and Me," or watch Richard Huey capture the stage with the many verses of "I Got a Song." "Bloomer Girl" is a bountiful hit even if it isn't as swift and light-hearted as it might have been.

Read
Motion Picture Critic's Reviews

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 6, 1944

Bloomer Girl Here to Stay

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NOT to scurry about for exotic phrases, *Bloomer Girl* is an unusually good musical. It will be a roaring hit, and it sets a standard that the season's other musicals may have trouble living up to. For *Bloomer Girl* is fresh and bright-looking; it has very nice music; it has very engaging dancing; it is held up at times but never hobbled by its book; it has more than a touch of period charm without any taint of period mustiness. Its people are attractive and its taste, by and large, is exemplary. If it has a weakness, that weakness is rather a paradoxical one; by maintaining so satisfactory a general level, *Bloomer Girl* lures you on to expect peak moments that it only occasionally achieves.

Like *Oklahoma!*, with which it can be compared if not quite bracketed, *Bloomer Girl* prefers the bygone to the brash, and is willing to blend high spirits with picturesqueness. Laid in the East in 1861, its romantic center is Evelina Applegate (Celeste Holm), the daughter of a prosperous manufacturer of hoopskirts, and the favorite niece of the feminist inventor of bloomers. Not only do Dolly Bloomer's advanced ideas shock Papa Applegate's philistine soul; but her newfangled panties menace his hoop-skirt dynasty. And Evelina chooses to go along with Auntie. She loves Jeff Calhoun, the young Kentuckian that Papa has chosen for her, but the courtship founders when the fugitive slave that Abolitionist Aunt Dolly is helping to escape turns out to be Jeff's body servant. More trouble occurs when Papa gets Dolly jailed, and Evelina stubbornly joins her. This is *Bloomer Girl's* darkest hour; but the sun yet shines in all his glory.

• • •

If far from inspired, the book of *Bloomer Girl* at least is less insipid than most. Since this is a musical without a star comedian, its laughs are highly limited; but thanks to Miss Holm, to the acidulous Margaret Douglass as Dolly, and to Joan McCracken as an impish parlor-maid as well as a featured dancer, the book has its lighter side. But it is scarcely *Bloomer Girl's* greatest blessing.

Harold Arlen's score is not distinguished, but it is pleasing and bright, and after all the tired and rubbishy tunes musical comedy has been grinding out, one could understandingly overrate it. Certainly *Evelina* is a fetching love ditty, *I've Got a Song* a fine novelty, *When the Boys Come Home* a catchy tune, *Sunday in Cicero Falls* another catchy one. And Dooley Wilson puts over another nice number called *The Eagle and Me*. To be captious, I thought a bathroom ballad badly missed fire, and a lullaby that Miss Holm sang at Aunt Dolly's knee a downright mistake. Mr. Harburg's lyrics are pleasant and now and then amusing.

• • •

Miss de Mille's choreography is crisp, inventive and well-balanced. A Civil War ballet is clean and sharp, and manages to be serious without being arty, or wrong for Broadway. The first-act finale introduces some lovely waltzing, and the lighter numbers are lively and gay. Joan McCracken is naturally the heroine of these dances, and a very real heroine she is, combining pert looks and funny gestures with her fine humorous dancing style.

Miss Holm makes an attractive and likeable Evelina, with a proper archness and dash. She is still, I fear, not much of a singer; but despite her weak voice, she is acquiring a real gift for putting over a song. As Jeff, David Brooks sings well and has a very good musical-comedy personality. Margaret Douglass, looking rather like Bunthorne in her mannish get-ups, puts character into Dolly; and Matt Briggs is right as Papa Appelgate. And Richard Huey makes *I've Got a Song* something to remember.

On its pictorial side, *Bloomer Girl* is all that anyone could ask. Lemuel Ayers' sets and backdrops are handsome and stylish, and Miles White's costumes are stunning.

Bloomer Girl is beyond any question worth seeing—if you can manage to get in.

"Soldier's Wife"

Play by Rose Franken; staged by Miss Franken; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by William Brown Meloney at the John Golden Theatre, October 4, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 5, 1944

New Franken Play Is Sign She Should Write Less

By BURTON RASCOE

IF ROSE FRANKEN will take a tip from her own play, Soldier's Wife, which opened at the John Golden Theater last night, it isn't absolutely necessary that, ever since her success with Claudia, she should have one or two plays produced on Broadway each year. She has wealth, a steady income from the road companies and revivals of Claudia and other plays, a country estate and a town house. She should relax and wait until she has something to write about; for she has imagination and dramatic skill.

Soldier's Wife, to put it bluntly, is as phony a piece of writing, as hollow and inept a piece, as I ever heard of coming from a dramatist of reputation. The very title is misleading and therefore seems meretricious; for the problem Miss Franken attempts sentimentally to resolve has nothing to do with Katherine Rogers' (Martha Scott's) being a soldier's wife or with John Rogers' (Myron McCormick's) being a soldier; it is simply the story of a wife's winning a literary success on a fluke and a question as to whether she should throw away her chances to make more money by signing Hollywood and syndicate contracts or keep on being the very domestic wife of a $6000-a-year chemist husband.

Career Woman

It is Miss Franken's argument that Kathie should stick to her cheap "chinz-stuffed rabbit warren," her bargain hunting, her babies and her husband and not go running off to the fleshpots of Hollywood or otherwise embarking on a money-making career.

I can't help thinking there is an unpremeditated irony in all this and that Miss Franken is not exactly in a position to preach such a Pollyanna sermon, since I can't see any essential difference between what a Katherine Rogers of her play might write and what Miss Franken does not hesitate to write for the stage (such as Soldier's Wife) and for the popular magazines. In the play, Kathie has written letters to her captain husband in the South Seas, such interesting and amusing letters that, once they have come to the attention of a publisher they are issued in book form (much to Kathie's amazement), and she becomes a literary success overnight, sought by editors, syndicate managers, interviewers, Hollywood producers and what-not. She decides to stop right there and be a real wife, not a career woman. Miss Franken, with no more to say than Kathie at the moment, hasn't stopped; she seems bound to write two plays a year.

Five Accomplished Players

In writing Soldier's Wife, Miss Franken has one eye on the plays of Noel Coward and one eye on the more edifying writings of the late Eleanor Porter. I think it would have been better if she had stuck to Coward and had her Kathie accept all the offers that came to her, including the penthouse in New York and the mansion with swimming pool in Hollywood—and see what she could do with that. By sticking to her purposes she has a very dull first act, a very dull third act, a second act which is amusing only because of Glenn Anders' droll type of fatigued articulation of the "sophisticated" quiddities (some of them esoteric to the general) assigned to him; and an air of utter unreality to the whole sentimental concoction.

For the cast, Miss Franken has five attractive and accomplished players, all justifiably given feature billing—Martha Scott, Myron McCormick, Glenn Anders, Frieda Inescort and Lili Darvas. They are all so welcome to the Broadway scene that it is a pleasure to watch them even in such a dime-store greeting card as Soldier's Wife.

THE CAST

Katherine Rogers.....Martha Scott
Florence Lane.....Frieda Inescort
John Rogers.....Myron McCormick
Alexander Craig.....Glenn Anders
Peter Gray.....Lili Darvas

that's an error. We remember her very well some three years ago in Ferdinand Bruckner's "The Criminals" at the Studio Theatre in 12th Street.

In private life, of course, Miss Darvas is the wife of Ferenc Molnar. Once a leading figure in the Continental Theatre, she appeared here in 1926 under Reinhardt (in German repertory) and anyone who saw her then, or remembers her films, needs no reminder that she is an actress of distinction and skill. Nor is she afflicted with the distracting mannerisms all too often associated with Continental stars.

As for Miss Inescort, she is as much at home on the stage as ever, poised, gracious, charming. Hollywood, which has a peculiar effect on the playing of so many Broadway emigres, has been unable to shake her firm theatre technique.

The only faintly carping note we can think of is a suggestion that the actors speak up just a bit. Some of the lines were lost last night amid the audience's coughs.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 5, 1944

'Soldier's Wife' Bows At Golden Theatre

By JIM O'CONNOR

"SOLDIER'S WIFE" came to town last night and made herself at home in the John Golden Theatre. She should remain here a long time, for she's a welcome visitor.

It is a timely, provocative play about a husband back from the war after being away a year and a half. His faithful wife, who found new independence during his absence, awaits him. There's also his infant son, whom he sees for the first time.

But John Rogers, the husband, played by Myron McCormick, feels strange. The war has changed things. And Katherine Rogers, the wife, played by Martha Scott, feels strange. Her husband has changed.

If this sounds like the start of a dry, complex drama on family reconversion from war to a peacetime basis, it doesn't work out that way on the stage of the Golden.

For "Soldier's Wife" turns out to be a bright, sophisticated, intelligent comedy. Clever lines abound.

Debut In Comedy

Making her debut in comedy, the talented Martha Scott is a tender, appealing yet amusing Katherine. While she previously appeared behind footlights in "Our Town," it was in Hollywood that Miss Scott won an Academy Award. Remember her in "Cheers for Miss Bishop?"

The veteran Myron McCormick, of "Winterset," brings to the role of John Rogers a restraint and dry humor that is most engaging.

In the pleasant plot, young Mrs. Rogers finds herself projected into the limelight as the author of a best-seller. Letters she wrote her husband in the South Pacific are published in book form. There's publicity, movie offers, bids from newspapers—wealth ahead for Katherine.

The husband, anxious to regain his place as the family breadwinner, is puzzled. Is his wife drifting away? What to do?

Just when a new world of glitter is about to engulf them, Katherine's love for her husband, her baby and her home prevails. In the midst of the gay furore over her impending career, she hears her baby cry and goes to him—permanently. And to her husband, too.

In a sense, "Soldier's Wife" is a poignant love story—the struggle of a confused couple to recapture romance. And this is done not with mirrors but with merriment. The dialogue, although sometimes lengthy, is suave and sparkling.

Others in the faultless cast are Frieda Inescort, of "Pygmalion;" Glenn Anders, who has appeared in five Pulitzer Prize plays; and Lili Darvas, wife of Ferenc Molnar, the Continental playwright, who was making her bow on the English speaking stage.

Rose Franken, who wrote and directed "Soldier's Wife," shares honors with the cast. Her latest effort comes up to the high standard of her previous "Claudia." Incidentally, Miss Franken is herself a career woman and wife of the producer, William Brown Meloney.

All the action in the three acts takes place in the Rogers' apartment on the West Side. This single setting, created by Raymond Sovey, is home-like and excellent.

Of course, "Soldier's Wife" sounds more like a label than the title of a charming comedy. But what's in a name? The play's the thing. And this is a play!

NEW YORK POST
October 5, 1944

'Soldier's Wife' a Slight but Attractive Comedy by Rose Franken

By WILELLA WALDORF

LAST season Rose Franken's drama, "Outrageous Fortune," though certainly no masterpiece, was one of the very few new Broadway plays worth more than the most casual sort of critical attention. Last night she followed it up with a deft and amusing comedy called "Soldier's Wife," at the Golden Theatre. We hereby recommend it to practically everybody.

It is a long time since we have been able to recommend anything without tossing in a flock of ifs, ands and buts. "Soldier's Wife," however, struck us as an unusually entertaining play, simple, unpretentious, intelligent and full of a warm understanding of human nature and decent values, plus a constantly diverting sense of humor. In short, a thoroughly civilized comedy.

The plot is so slight that there is really no point in trying to put it into print. Miss Franken is concerned with an Army captain who returns from the Pacific after being slightly wounded. He has a little trouble getting used to being a civilian again and his wife has not only borne a child in his absence but learned how to do quite a lot of other things, such as repair electric gadgets and write letters. The letters written to her husband at the front are published under the title, "Soldier's Wife" and cause quite a furore in the literary world.

A Best-Seller

The authoress, who confesses candidly that she can't write, gets fabulous offers to go to Hollywood, where it doesn't matter particularly whether she can write or not, and the simple household routine on Riverside Drive is complicated considerably by the arrival of a svelt editress and her ex-husband who occasionally does interview at a hundred dollars a throw when he can't pay his rent.

Miss Franken tells the slender story she has to tell economically with only five characters, all delightful, and so wittily that it adds up to a remarkably merry evening. Nothing elaborate, you understand. Just pleasant comedy with a warm feeling behind it, smartly directed by the author herself.

In "Outrageous Fortune," Miss Franken demonstrated a marked facility for casting. She has been equally shrewd in selecting her small company for "Soldier's Wife."

In the title role Martha Scott demonstrates once more that she is one of the brightest young actress of the decade. Myron McCormick does his usual reliable job as the returned soldier, and Glenn Anders has a wonderful time with the role of the interviewer.

Miss Franken has a flair for finding just the right people for the parts she writes even if she has to go to considerable trouble getting them. Last season she lured Elsie Ferguson out of retirement with gratifying results, and now she has not only brought Frieda Inescort back from Hollywood after a ten-year absence, but is introducing Lili Darvas in her first English-speaking role on Broadway.

The program says this is Miss Darvas's first English-speaking role in America but

NEW YORK SUN
October 5, 1944

Rose Franken's Sparse Comedy, 'Soldier's Wife,' Is Presented at the Golden

By WARD MOREHOUSE

ROSE FRANKEN, one of the most industrious of the dramatists, is not waiting until the war's end to write her plays. She came along with two last season and now she has a new one, "Soldier's Wife," presented last evening at the Golden, whose stage became available when "Angel Street" packed up and moved down the block.

"Soldier's Wife" does not restore Miss Franken to her hit-writing form. It is a sparse and insufficient play. There is some crisp dialogue in it, as you always find in this playwright's pieces. But the material is scanty, thinly spread over three acts. At times you wonder how Miss Franken can go on with it. And she frequently doesn't.

Miss Franken's subject is that of readjustment of family life upon the return of the soldier. The soldier of her play is Capt. John Rogers, who is back home after having been in action in the far Pacific and severely wounded. He resumes his career as a chemist but finds adapting himself to a civilian world is not too easy. Meanwhile, letters which his young wife wrote him during the long months of his absence have made a great impression on a publisher and are brought forth as a book—"Soldier's Wife." It becomes a best seller and Hollywood is buying it for big money. But Katherine Rogers doesn't lose her head. She has no yearnings for white rugs and a swank apartment. She prefers to go along with the life and the apartment that they have—and she wants another baby. You are given the feeling that John and Katherine will make a go of it, that their marriage is secure.

There are only five characters in Miss Franken's play and at least one of these, that of a vague sort of woman editor, has little or no bearing upon the proceedings. As I have previously observed, this playwright, who does her own direction, gets good performances from her casts and those participating in "Soldier's Wife" do their best to make a play of it.

Martha Scott has the role of the young wife who makes the observation that the war has caused most wives to learn to live like widows. She plays it with feeling and a sense of its comedy values. Myron McCormick, pleasantly recurrent in the Broadway theater season after season, but not an actor with the best of luck in finding his plays, is restrained, likeable and believable as an honorably discharged soldier who feels out of place in civilian clothes. Frieda Inescort, too long absent from the local stage, gives distinction to the part of the sister. Lili Darvas is the editor and Glenn Anders contributes an enormously amusing performance as an interviewer—wry, dry, sophisticated and cynical, and representing a world that Katherine and John are not a part of and don't understand.

Miss Franken's subject is a timely one and to it she brings her gift of observation and her talent for pungent dialogue. I wish she had taken the time to give "Soldier's Wife" more substance as a play.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 5, 1944

Miss Franken Touches Slightly on the War, and Much on Love, in 'Soldier's Wife'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT IS probable that those who do not reach for the moon along with their copy of The Playbill may have a generally pleasant time at Rose Franken's "Soldier's Wife," which put in an appearance last evening. And it is not only probable but inevitable that those who attend the theatre when the moon is down—the matinees being Wednesday and Saturday — will find the John Golden's occupant considerably more than generally pleasant. For Miss Franken's new variation on the theme of her highly successful "Claudia" is addressed to the ladies; it is not a play of iron, fire or philosophy, but it has a certain amount of charm, good acting and enough bright dialogue to carry its weight.

* * *

Perhaps it is the acting which may bring to Miss Franken another success rather than the facts to be found in the script itself. Martha Scott has come back from the Coast to play the leading role and she does so most attractively. She is a sort of Claudia; forgetful, a bargain searcher, a little vague about painting and politics. Miss Scott is a cheerful actress who avoids some of the cliches she might easily pluck from Miss Franken's quiver and as a wife who inadvertently wrote a best seller and then tried to save her family from the ill effects of that enterprise, she is most likable.

The other members of the cast of five also are properly behaved. Myron Mc-

Cormick is the young husband, a young husband not unlike Claudia's young husband, and he plays it easily and well. To Glenn Anders have fallen most of the play's amusing lines, and when he is saying them Mr. Anders is very funny. Frieda Inescort is a sister, and Lili Darvas, who in private life is the wife of Ferenc Molnar, is the editor of a woman's page who is seeking further articles from the author of a best seller. Miss Franken apparently is not ignorant of women's pages; her portrait of the editor, and Miss Darvas's interpretation, is in good caricature.

As a play, as distinguished from the evening, "Soldier's Wife" is far from perfect. There is little beyond the formula of a young couple's encountering a momentary difficulty, and the title is a little misleading in that it is not a war play seeking to settle a problem. The wife in the case has written her husband a series of letters while he is in the Pacific, and after he is invalided out of the Army, they are published. The screen looms, magazines offer large amounts of money, a bigger apartment is suggested; but the wife decides to stick with her husband and the baby — and even to have another baby.

A cynic or a thoroughgoing scoundrel might say that "Soldier's Wife" misses no part of the formula by which problems are posed and not answered, and situations created and then dropped, but the John Golden obviously is no place for a cynic. Without pretense of being more than it is, Miss Franken's play this year is pleasant; and after the season's carnage, a dash of Claudia will do no harm.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 5, 1944

Ashes on the Home Fires

By HOWARD BARNES

IT IS fortunate for "Soldier's Wife" that Rose Franken knows how to twist chit-chat to comic advantage and that she has some expert twisters around in her latest play. Take away the random flurries of nonsense at the John Golden Theater, bar Glenn Anders from the stage, and there is very little that remotely resembles a dramatic entertainment. Perhaps the author had the notion that she was writing a profound and subtle commentary on the readjustments that are in order as men discard uniforms and existence reverts to a hypothetical norm. The idea never crystallizes in a play. Some slick wit and smooth performing are all that you will find in this offering.

* * *

More the pity, too, since Miss Franken's thesis is completely valid. She sets out to describe the inevitable conflict of interests, ideas and feelings which an honorably discharged soldier and his attractive wife might experience at this red-hot moment. The man is battle-worn, but stubbornly allergic to pity. The wife finds herself famous overnight, when her letters to a fighting man are published. So what does the author do? She ignores the hard core of her subject matter to whip up a few funny verbal encounters between the character of the title and a jaded interviewer, and some less amusing theatrical business between the veteran and a highly susceptible editor.

* * *

Miss Franken and her husband and producer, William Brown Meloney, have had no lack of acting collaboration in their enterprise. Martha Scott plays the wife with an artful combination of dim-witted naivete and wisdom. Myron McCormick does everything but show his wounds to make a dimensional character of the invalided soldier. Meanwhile, Anders is smart enough to ignore the absence of a play and concentrate on laughter. That his part has almost no bearing on the evolution of what passes for a plot is the best index of the show's poverty.

* * *

In the second act you will find him an engaging fellow, doing a rather hilarious caricature of a women's page editor. Miss Franken has tossed him the best lines in her work and he makes the most of them. Lili Darvas tries hard to be a meddling editor, but without much effect. Frieda Inescort, as a widow whose husband has died on the home front, is stately, serene and extremely attractive in a part which might have been made the dominant role in a play of any dominance. The fact is that "Soldier's Wife" scarcely gets started, arrives nowhere and has very little entertainment to offer en route.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 5, 1944

A War Play in Name Only

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MISS FRANKEN'S new play will be a success, not least at matinees. The title is not the key to it, for *Soldier's Wife* isn't a feminine problem play, or more than glancingly a war play; it really is not a play at all, but something put together with pins to divert through its dialogue, its details, its small recognitions, its dusting of surfaces, its acting opportunities. It is quite harmless and quite aimless. It is light, and it is empty. Dramaturgically, it adds up to nothing because it tosses in everything.

Miss Franken begins with a young wife whose husband comes home from the South Pacific, and with the suggestion that they must get used to living together again. But the play veers quickly toward catch-as-catch-can comedy: Kay's letters to John overseas find a publisher and become a success; a cynical interviewer and a smart lady editor descend upon the household and give Kay a whirl. But Kay, in the end turns her back on dazzle and clings to domesticity. In other words, first the war enters the menage, then success, then sophistication, then an inkling of sex and a twinge of jealousy. A pousse-cafe rather than a play.

* * *

But Miss Franken's is a fairly shrewd way of getting nowhere and saying nothing. It is to point up all the details of domesticity — clothes and food and slip-covers and bargain-hunting and the care and feeding of babies. It is to make bright, easy copy of a bored interviewer; to paint a contrast between the smart professional world that comes in at the door and the solid family world that at last refuses to go out of it. None of this may fill the play—there are, indeed, some very languid stretches—but it punctuates it agreeably. Some of Miss Franken's lines are amusing, some of them the actors make amusing, some of them the opening night audience seemed to find amusing, and many are just forced and flat.

Miss Franken has directed things nicely, though there are moments when the play comes to a standstill; and the acting is decidedly helpful. Martha Scott is attractive and pleasant as the young wife who has her Claudia moments, though the role quite eludes reality. Myron McCormick is excellent, and considerably more convincing, in the part of the husband; and Frieda Inescourt is quietly effective as Kay's older sister. Glenn Anders is the interviewer, and very funny at the start; but the part runs down, and Mr. Anders — perhaps unavoidably — with it. Lili Dervas is the magazine editor, and as sophisticated as there is any need to be.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 5, 1944

'Soldier's Wife' a Delightful Little Comedy of a Home-Front Crisis

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ROSE FRANKEN'S "Soldier's Wife" is a delightful evening with some very pleasant people. If you'd had them at home for a little party some night you'd have considered the party a success, for they talk amiably and brightly—but not so damnably wittily as to become bores.

"Soldier's Wife" has in it none of the strain of being a sailor's wife, as was revealed night before last in "Men to the Sea." It is a slight story about a husband home from the war and how he and his ever-loving have to get readjusted. It may have a touch of philosophical content, but its main purpose is the small-talk at which Miss Franken excels.

Miss Franken can turn an epigram when she has to and can even make reasonably human beings out of sophisticates; but her excellence is in the domestic humors of cretonne slip-covers, babies dropping gooey zwieback on the floor and housewives hunting bargains like tobacco humidors with cracks in them.

A Chance at Comedy.

In the play at the Golden Theatre Martha Scott does something she has been wanting to do ever since "Our Town" typed her as an actress of tragic wistfulness; she gets into comedy and proves herself to be a graceful and knowing little humorist.

She's the soldier's wife of the title. When her husband is invalided home from New Guinea and gets a medical discharge, life begins over again for them but they can't quite make it the same old life. New elements have entered—like a baby, for instance, because playwrights seem to be having all service men come home to babies born during their absence.

For another instance, the wife suddenly becomes a success—a far greater success than her $6,000-a-year chemist husband. Through his conniving all of her letters to him are put in a book and the book becomes a best-seller. The little bargain-hunting, baby-rearing, cabbage cooking hausfrau is all of an instant a celebrity and people begin taking her up. A famous woman editor takes her up, and so does the editor's indolent, epigrammatic ex-husband, and so do movie people who want her to write scenarios.

Post-War Adjustment.

But everything is all right in Miss Franken's world. The wife chooses to remain a homebody and lets the glitter slide. The small philosophical content of the comedy is this: Men coming home from the war will find changes even in their wives — because the wives, having learned how to live practically as widows for so long, will have found a new strength and independence in themselves. And this will call for some post-war adjustment on the part of both parties.

Myron McCormick plays the returned soldier quietly, quizzically and amiably. As a pair of sophisticates — the editor and her ex — Lili Darvas and Glenn Anders never overdo things. Since Miss Franken directed them as well as wrote their lines, she gets an A for restraint. Frieda Inescourt, playing Miss Scott's sister, is helpful—both around the house and to the play.

New York
Theatre Critics' Review

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A Valuable and Authoritative Record of the Contemporary Theatre

"Men to the Sea"

Play by Herbert Kubly; staged by Eddie Dowling; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by Dave Wolper at the National Theatre, October 3, 1944

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 4, 1944

In a Leaky Boat

By HOWARD BARNES

HERBERT KUBLY'S "Men to the Sea" tries bravely to restore a measure of dignity and imagination to theatrical doings. With Eddie Dowling's sensitive direction and players who make you feel they believe in their make-believe, the new play at the National Theater has moments of passion and eloquence. Unfortunately they are a bit fugitive for comfort. Too often the death watch of sailors' wives which the author celebrates is buried in a clutter of disorganized scenes, mystical nonsense and sentimental asides. The drama may be sincere, but, on the whole, it is a dissonant improvization.

* * *

If the author had chosen a literary frame for his work he might have proved more successful. As it stands, "Men to the Sea" sprawls across a stage so awkwardly that it has quite a time keeping in communication with an audience. The theme of the piece is obvious enough. It receives direct and rather striking treatment in a passage where sailors go off to battle stations, leaving their wives to their various compacts with destiny. Realism reaches a strident pitch in a boarding house Christmas party which the husbands would not have liked. The catch is that the action is forever shifting back and forth between a group of rather sordid case histories and somewhat metaphysical flights of fancy.

* * *

The straight reporting, which has raised censorial eyebrows during the try-out of the piece, is considerably better than the spiritual musings. When Kubly is dealing with the moral lapses of service men's wives, he is moulding the stuff of a stern drama. The service men themselves trip up the chances for a taut tragedy by giving forth with an incredible anthology of quotations, or standing noble night watches. Meanwhile, it is a bit disconcerting to find the Negro couple of the lot enunciating the few snatches of wisdom which are distilled from the plot.

* * *

To Dowling must go great credit for the fact that the offering is not hopelessly turbid. He has packed an emotional wallop into several fragments of the piece with Howard Bay settings to help him. He has worked strenuously to pull it into some sort of effective dramatic unity. Toni Gilman is happily restrained as the girl who tries to find her killed husband, if you can follow this conceit, by taking up with every sailor she meets. Then there are Maggie Gould as a regenerate tramp; Randolph Echols as the sea-going seer; Susana Garnett and the dusky Mildred Smith to fill in the multitude of cracks which keep appearing in "Men to the Sea." Neither the actors nor Dowling turn the trick, but they save what there is of a play which tries hard, even though it does not come off.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
October 4, 1944

The Wives They Left Behind 'Em

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER riding the stormy waves of censorship in New Haven and Boston, *Men to the Sea* finally docked at the National Tuesday night. As it turned out, not the only trouble besetting the play is that the censors found it too much to swallow. The author himself, I fear, bit off a great deal more than he could chew.

Men to the Sea concerns five sailors' wives—four white and one Negro—who, while their husbands are at sea, live together in a Brooklyn rooming-house. What it tries to portray is the disintegrating effect on their lives of sexual privation. Two of the women, to whom easy morals come as second nature, wage no struggle with themselves; one of them gets pregnant by another man. One of the others, hardly more than a child bride, does a little harmless flirting; another remains faithful until her husband is killed at sea. Only Hyacinth, the Negro wife, remains untempted. There are scenes with the husbands as well as without them, and one Christmas Eve scene on a destroyer at sea.

* * *

Mr. Kubly's material is clearly valid and vital enough; indeed, it constitutes one of the serious problems of our time. But in every important sense, he has failed to dramatize it and give it meaning. Technically it is always hazardous — however tempting — to deal with a large social group; there is seldom time to delve very deeply into the characters; what should be private scenes must too often be played in public; the construction tends to be jerky and the play as a whole to sprawl rather than build. Mr. Kubly has not really circumvented these pitfalls, and *Men to the Sea* becomes a long evening and a diffuse one.

But the trouble goes much deeper. Mr. Kubly is sincere enough, but he can't resist being sensational also; or being pretentious. One does not mind the very plain talk in the play so much as the utter concentration upon sex. No doubt sex dominates these people's lives; but hardly so publicly or so melodramatically; and the women have also the problem of living together, which is ignored, and of sometimes looking inside themselves, which is barely touched on. Mr. Kubly has contrived every possible kind of scene, from what should be shocking to what should be moving; yet one is neither shocked nor moved—nor convinced. The author seems to have thought up situations rather than studied human beings. There is something hammy about his crucial scenes; and something fancy, which only ends as banal, about his whole approach. Leaves flutter symbolically outside windows; an organ-grinder is always ready with a tune; characters read Chaucer, quote Villon, discuss the Bible; and utter, not the platitudes that might be true of them, but the platitudes that the author mistakes for profundity. And at the end there are some all-too-pretty speeches.

The production is now and then effective, but generally weak: Mr. Dowling has not had an easy script to work with. Toni Gilman, Maggie Gould, Mildred Smith, Susana Garnett, Randoph Echols, Maurice Ellis, Michael Strong and others never give the script any extra values, but most of them perform passably; the real fault lies elsewhere.

THE CAST

Hazel	Maggie Gould
Christabel	Toni Gilman
Nic	Joe Verdi
Madame Mosh	Grace Mills
Julie	Joyce Mathews
Bonnie	Susana Garnett
Joe Foster	Tom Noonan
Duckworth	Randolph Echols
Brophy	Richard Camp
Chauncey	Michael Strong
Reuben	Maurice Ellis
Howard Moore	James Alexander
Hyacinth	Mildred Smith
French Sailor	James Elliott
Dick Graham	Frank Etherton
Hughes	Bill Hunt
Tall Girl	Mary Jean Copeland
Red	Marguerite Clifton
Harry	Paul Crabtree

NEW YORK POST
October 4, 1944

'Men to the Sea' Is Full of Sailors, Sin and Bible Quotations

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE legendary sailor with a girl in every port cannot expect the wife he left behind him hard by the Brooklyn Navy Yard to spend all of her evenings playing solitaire or making hooked rugs.

That is the cheery message Herbert Kubly imparts in "Men to the Sea," produced with considerable ceremony last night at the National Theatre by Dave Wolper, who already has another Broadway attraction on the boards, aptly entitled "Follow the Girls."

Mr. Kubly is interested chiefly in a gun crew of the destroyer Christabel, whose wives spend the lonely months, or even years, while their husbands are at sea, in a Brooklyn rooming house. The rooming house is not attractive and the park outside is crawling with sailors of all the United Nations. Although Madame Mosh, the proprietress, pronounces her title with the accent on the second syllable, it soon becomes evident that sin is rampant on the premises, especially up in Hazel's room.

Back Home in Brooklyn

When the author writes simply, and without frills, of simple people, he occasionally manages to bring them to life for a brief period, but all too often he fancies a lush, literary manner that puts a strain on his actors, already struggling against sketchy characterization.

This makes for unreality and a stagey quality that Eddie Dowling enhances by directing the play as if it were a series of tableaux. While one character or another pours out Mr. Kubly's studied prose, Mr. Dowling causes others on the stage to strike an attitude signifying despair, hope, agony or resignation and stay that way until the soliloquy is over, except, perhaps, for an occasional sob, or a convulsive clutch at a rumpled kerchief.

There were times last night when it reminded us a bit of those living statues they used to feature in the circus before it was streamlined. House dark. A bit of a rustle and tussle. Up she goes. What does it represent? The Sailor's Home Coming? Men Must Fight and Women Must Weep?

What's that about Hosea and the Lord telling him to marry Gomer, a harlot? Hot stuff, right out of the Bible.

A Poetic Gunner

The Great Duckworth, captain of the gun crew, is fearless and romantic and quotes Francois Villon far, far too much for a character not manufactured by Maxwell Anderson. Nevertheless he and his loyal wife, Christabel, nicknamed for his ship, are a bit more like people and less like pasteboards than most of the others, some of whom are little short of caricature, notably a British tar from Coventry.

The most lifelike scene in the play is the Christmas eve party with Frank Etherton playing the piano and some of the boys and girls carrying on through a Scotch mist while a bomb is landing on the U. S. S. Christabel somewhere in the Mediterranean.

Mr. Kubly's penchant for making his points rather elaborately obvious and then embroidering them with Biblical quotations becomes increasingly disturbing as the play goes on as does Mr. Dowling's partiality for stained-glass attitudes, his tendency to have his actors signify youth, reckless youth, by persistent bursts of giggling, and indicate emotional struggle by much too much synthetic sobbing.

Synthetic, we are very much afraid, is the word for this play. Even Howard Bay's too,

too starry set atop the destroyer on Christmas eve looked very, very theatrical. All the time the boys were talking about Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene, and Hosea and Gomer, we kept expecting the stars to run together and spell "Scenic Artists Union."

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 4, 1944

'Men to the Sea' At National Theatre

By JIM O'CONNOR

A CURIOUS mixture of maudlin drama, low comedy, morality, immorality, religion, social equality of the races and love landed on the stage of the National Theatre last night. There was even a baby.

Herbert Kubly, a newspaper man himself, wrapped them all together in a play entitled "Men to the Sea." It is his first play. Let us hope he can do better next time.

The sponsor is Dave Wolper, the night club man, who clicked with his first stage effort, "Follow the Girls," a musical hit. Dave didn't do so well the second time.

Although called "Men to the Sea," it's all about some U. S. sailors' wives at home who "play around" while their mates are away. It seems the poor girls are lonely. A better play could be written about the real loneliness of the men on shipboard.

The performance as a whole was frequently "jumpy," despite the fact it was directed by the experienced and usually competent Eddie Dowling.

But Four 'Cheat'

These five girl-wives live in a Brooklyn furnished room house while their sailor-husbands are on the high seas. One is happily married, with a child. But the other four "cheat."

One of these expects a baby, born out of wedlock. When the husband docks and learns the truth, he says: "Lets talk this over." Which just gives you an idea!

Certainly, "Men to the Sea" is no true picture of this war's U. S. Navy men nor their wives.

It's largely a loud and lewd story, sprinkled with profanity. No wonder it ran into censorship trouble on the road. There are also beds, a drunken orgy—and a mother feeding her infant.

Best of Settings

In the large cast, there are outstanding performers. Toni Gilman's "Christabel," Randolph Echols' "Duckworth" and Susana Garnet's "Bonnie" are as good as the lines will allow.

Best of the settings by Howard Bay is the Christmas Eve scene in a gun tub on the deck of a destroyer.

The author takes three acts and eight scenes to tell his incoherent story, which drags at times. As a result, the jumbled plot often becomes "all at sea" and peters out to an illogical ending.

"Men to the Sea" is nautical, but not nice. On my chart, it's not likely to remain in port very long.

NEW YORK SUN
October 4, 1944

'Men to the Sea,' Awkward and Jumbled, Presented at the National Theater

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"MEN TO THE SEA," Herbert Kubly's first play, contains some incisive writing and moments of sincerity and poignancy but, taking it as a whole, it comes forth as an awkward and jumbled piece of playwriting. Produced by Dave Wolper and staged by Eddie Dowling, it opened last night at the National.

Mr. Kubly uses scriptural parallels and Biblical passages in writing of the loneliness, restlessness, frustrations and infidelities of the wives of men of the sea. There is a lot of rough and ready talk and there are some genuinely moving scenes. The tautness of certain portions, however is not achieved throughout and the mixture of realism and symbolism does not provide first-rate drama. The opening act is quite the best of the three.

"Men to the Sea" pictures life in a dingy Brooklyn rooming house occupied by five young women, sailors' wives — Christabel, Hazel, Julie, Bonnie and Hyacinth, who is colored. In these rooms they have their tearful good-bys and their tumultuous reunions. Christabel has a baby and is deeply in love with her husband—the great Duckworth he is called and a gunner's mate he is, unafraid and given to quotations from the Bible and Francois Villon. Julie plays around and is quite frank about it. Bonnie, a bride at 16, has dates and goes to parties but doesn't go too far. Hazel, toughest of the lot, is defiantly on the loose. Hyacinth has both loyalty and dignity.

Duckworth is killed by strafing from a plane while at his battle station aboard his destroyer. The bewildered Christabel goes in for promiscuity, seeking out sailors in the park. Hazel is pregnant when the boys return and she blurts out the truth to her dazed and uncomprehending young husband. Like Hosea in the Bible, he receives the news with forgiveness in his heart. A posthumous message from Duckworth brings about the redemption of Christabel. It's the author's point that love does not end with death.

"Men to the Sea" has been staged by Eddie Dowling with relish and devotion. He has had a group of not particularly well-known players to work with, and that's to his liking. Last night's premiere brought forth some good performances. Toni Gilman does well enough as Christabel, a role which the author never clarifies. Susana Garnett has some affecting scenes as Bonnie; she will be getting attention from Hollywood before many hours have passed. Randolph Echols brings sincerity and a Shakepearean background to the part of the spiritual Duckworth. The two Negroes of the cast, Maurice Ellis and Mildred Smith, are excellent. So is Maggie Gould as the caustic Hazel. Appropriate settings have been contributed by Howard Bay. Dave Wolper's production is an expensive one and this is immediately apparent.

This "Men of the Sea" is not a pretty play; it is on the sordid side, definitely. It is not a good play, strictly speaking. But it reveals some strong writing and scenes of great feeling and brings forth Mr. Kubly as a writer of definite promise.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 4, 1944

Men to the Sea Brings a New Topnotch Dramatist

By BURTON RASCOE

THE theater has great reason to rejoice today. A new American dramatist of originality, skill, depth, power, vision, compassion and intelligence has appeared on the scene. He is 29-year-old Herbert Kubly, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, now on the staff of the New York Herald Tribune. He immediately takes rank with the best we have among those who write, or have written, for the theater. He is not merely a playwright of promise but one of conspicuous and distinguished achievement.

His first play, Men to the Sea, which was presented by Dave Wolper at the National last evening with a laudable cast under the inspired direction of Eddie Dowling, is not only the first war play we have had so far that is not either hackneyed or obvious or spurious in theme but one of the few plays in recent years which has a challenging idea, designed to shake up our complaisances, fixed ideas and misconceptions. At once realistic and symbolical, it cuts straight to the heart of the matter (and to the tears of things) without sentimentality but with depth, awareness and a mature sense of human values rarely encountered nowadays in things written for the stage or screen.

Service Wives

When you think how cheap and tawdry, false, flat and distasteful the situation in Men to the Sea would have been made by some of the cheapjack playsmiths who have offered us nauseous stuff mislabeled comedy and farce comedy, you can gauge how greatly Mr. Kulby is to be honored. His is a rebuke, in the grand manner, of all such catch-penny stuff.

The drama is a quite open acceptance of the fact that all wives of the men in our armed services overseas — especially among those young brides of hasty pre-Pearl Harbor marriages—have not been, and are not, true to their husbands. Their reasons are as varied as human nature. Some are not sure that they loved when they married; some are bewildered and lonely; some are emotionally immature; some have urgencies their scruples will not down; some are simply promiscuous or ambivalent by nature. As Mr. Kubly very forcibly, though indirectly, points out, it is neither intelligent nor helpful to deplore this fact or denounce it or to wax hypocritical or catharistic about it.

Mr. Kubly bids us consider Hosea and Gomer in the Old Testament and Jesus and the Magdalene in the New Testament and asks us, "Who is without sin among you?" And he does this, not in strained poetics as Maxwell Anderson might do it, or in modernized Greek tragedy as Eugene O'Neill might do it, or in wistful babbling naivetes as William Saroyan might do it, but in very realistic terms involving five girls in a Brooklyn rooming house who have married, during the height of the war hysteria, four ordinary young gobs they had barely met and one thoughtful, unusual chap whose wife was his childhood sweetheart. Two of the girls are, or believe themselves to be, tarts; another is only 16 and her marriage was not consummated because the boy had to go from the ceremony directly to ship; still another (a Negro girl) is faithful throughout, and the fifth, who bears a son to her husband while he is at sea, is faithful until his death unhinges her reason, and even then her promiscuity is only a vain searching for the love she has lost. The most incorrigible tart becomes pregnant after her husband has been 15 months at sea and her redemption is the parallel of the parable of Hosea and Gomer.

Dowling's Fine Hand

Duckworth (Randolph Echols), the protagonist of Mr. Kubly's theme, quotes Francois Villon and the Bible; he is without fear because he knows in his heart love does not die. He is idolized by his gun crew pals for they are more ignorant and earthy than he. But all of them are typical American boys, caught up in a frightening world of war and new dependencies . . . Besides these, there are other boys like them, including an English lad sent to recuperate in Brooklyn Navy Yard after being unnerved by half a dozen terrific experiences under submarine and air attack; and these boys comfort themselves with such love as they can find, even among the young, lonely wives of navy men.

All this is related with dignity, taste, poignancy and sense. Even the orgiastic scene of a drunken party has heart-breaking overtones. Every character is individualized; every scene is thought out with imagination and a sense of reality. Highest acting honors go to Joe Fisher and Maggie Gould for sustaining one terrifically touching scene during which the audience seemed to hold its breath for five minutes. Credit for the skill with which these 17 young actors and two middle-aged ones coped with their roles must go, however, to Eddie Dowling, whose fine touch is evident in every scene. . . . This is a play you must not miss if you care anything about the theater.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 4, 1944

Navy Wives

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BEDEVILED by the gnashing shears of the censor during its try-out days in New Haven and Boston, "Men to the Sea" arrived at the National last evening presumably in its pure, or original, form. Regardless of Back Bay disputes over art, it seemed that the censor may have been overlooking the wood for the trees. He found objection in individual lines and scenes, but if he had not read them one by one and had been a theatregoer accustomed to take a whole evening at a gulp, he would have said only that here was a highly pretentious play, full of sound and fury, and not signifying very much in the history of the drama.

Grant Herbert Kubly an idea on which a good evening in the theatre might be based. But in developing his idea, the author has sought refuge in purple words, and in staging the play Eddie Dowling has let slide no chance to make them obvious. Either the author or Mr. Dowling has caused leaves to fall and candles to go out in order to signify death, which is no new trick, and Mr. Kubly has reached the stage in playwriting where he is undecided whether Francois Villon or Christ held the answer to life —and from both he quotes liberally. Some of "Men to the Sea" is embarrassing in its high pretentiousness and some of it unfortunately seems a bit silly

"Men to the Sea" is mixed realism and symbolism, the latter not being always clear. Mr. Kubly's chief figures are the wives of a group of sailors, who are living in a Brooklyn boarding house while their husbands are at sea. There are five ultimately, and four ultimately have affairs with other sailors, although in one case a wife does so after her husband has been killed and, refusing to believe him dead, she looks for him in the Brooklyn parks. Hovering over this menage of sex and blonde hair is the figure of Duckworth, one of the husbands who is given to quoting Villon, and after he is killed, the memory of his goodness persuades everyone else to straighten himself out.

* * *

No objection can be found to the cast, for its members do as they have been told and the fault lies elsewhere. Randolph Echols is the Great Duckworth, and he does all right by that hero even if some of his dialogue is somewhat fanciful. Michael Strong gives a good performance as one of the sailors until such time as his hair is whitened and he looks a bit ridiculous; and James Alexander has the thankless part of being a British sailor who teaches young girls to read Chaucer. "Men To the Sea" is literary. Maggie Gould, Joyce Matthews, Toni Gilman, Susana Garnett and Mildred Smith are the wives; and if some of their actions are peculiar, maybe navy wives' actions are.

In directing, Mr. Dowling has spared no effort to make certain the audience will not miss the point. The leaves come down in stately array at suitable intervals, and a drunken, Christmas Eve rendition of "Silent Night" at a party by the wives, is taken up by "Silent Night" on a gun turret by the husbands. Everyone does as he has been doing in this sort of play since the beginning of the theatre, and this time, as often before, it is waste motion. For "Men to the Sea" just isn't worth it.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 4, 1944

'Men to the Sea' Has Sentiment and Vigor and Is Very Welcome

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"MEN TO THE SEA" is not a war play, but rather a play about some people in the war—some sailors and their wives and girls. It has vigor, and humor, and tenderness. Upon occasion it is oversentimental and at other times its theatrical contrivances threaten to loosen its grip upon an audience, and is final scene is not tightly enough written and is too much underplayed. But there is in it so very much to be thankful for that "Men to the Sea" is a superior work in the meagre library of drama pertaining to World War II.

Herbert Kubly, the author, is a New York Herald Tribune reporter and, so far as I know, a first-time playwright. If there were more like him the theatre would contain less junk, for he has imagined living persons and made you believe in them, like them and go along with them. He knows the value of contrast, writes clearly and can touch the heart.

Scores as Director

Eddie Dowling first bought "Men to the Sea" to produce for himself, then relinquished it to Dave Wolper but remained as director. Under his guidance the play has been practically perfectly cast and staged, with typical Dowling method of understatement being almost always just right. Only in the end, when several actors and actresses all begin acting like Dowling in his most repressed mood, does one wish for lines and action to become taut.

Reports from Hartford and Boston, where censors did some clipping during the tryout, indicated that "Men to the Sea" was dirty. It isn't. There are some earthy lines and some lustful party scenes—but they fit characters and situations and so, I think, belong.

Kubly's story is mainly about three sailors' wives, living at Madame Mosh's Brooklyn boarding house and waiting for their men from leave to leave. One, Christabel, is wed to a poet—a chief petty officer whose gun crew speak of him as The Great Duckworth. They have a baby. Another, Bonnie, a simple lass, has had a one-day honeymoon with a happy scamp named Brophy.

The third, Hazel, is a slut. She is married to a decent lad named Chauncey, but she figures that all sailors have all the women they want so why shouldn't a woman have all the sailors she wants. There are other girls, including a gentle negro wife, and casual sailors, including a British tar habituated to reading Chaucer and telling a girl she tastes like honey on strawberries. Now and again this chap embarrassed me.

A Christmas Party

Kubly's eight scenes range from some of the boarding house rooms to a deck gun on a destroyer. They are all vivid as they tell of the loneliness and loves of the people involved. There is one excellently-paced, noisy scene of a Christmas Eve drinking party, followed in sharp contrast by a glimpse of four lonely gunners in the South Pacific at the same moment.

A Jap plane bombs the gun tub and The Great Duckworth, who knows that death cannot end love, is killed.

The performances are of an even excellence. Maggie Gould as Hazel, Toni Gilman as Christabel, Susana Garnett as Bonnie, Joyce Mathews as a friend, Randolph Echols as Duckworth, Richard Camp as Brophy—all rate applause. Frank Etherton, in the role of a piano-playing gob, helps the party scene immeasurably. The sets are by Howard Bay —which means okay.

"The Odds on Mrs. Oakley"

Play by Harry Segall; staged by Arthur Sircom; settings by Fredrick Fox. Presented by Robert Reud at the Cort Theatre, October 2, 1944

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
October 3, 1944

'Mrs. Oakley', Racing Farce

By ROBERT GARLAND

"THE Odds on Mrs. Oakley," a new farce about a racehorse owned by a divorced couple, started last night at the Cort Theatre track. Joy Hodges is entered as the favorite in the cast, with John Archer and Bruce MacFarlane as runners-up.

Coached by Arthur Sircum, this play consists of two acts in six scenes.

They're off after a quarrel in the Oakley home; they jockey for position around the rail at a turf club cocktail lounge the next year and then bunch into Joy's apartment three months later.

After three more months, on the back stretch, the players are at the turf club again. Within two weeks, they're back in Joy's suite. And they finish there ten days later.

All the action takes place at the present time in New York City. Settings are by Fredrick Fox.

Producer is Robert Reud, who trained the farce on the road before heading it in to Broadway. "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," at the Booth, and "Ramshackle Inn," now on tour, also wear the Reud colors.

Harry Segall, out of Hollywood, who rated with "Lost Horizon" some years ago, is the author of "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley," which worked out previously as "It Runs in The Family," "Fanny" and "Our Fanny."

THE CAST

Oliver Oakley	John Archer
Susan Oakley	Joy Hodges
The Professor	Morton L. Stevens
Eddie	Ben Laughlin
Dennie	Hildegarde Halliday
Gladys	Virginia Reed
Sam	Allen Kearns
Louie	John Effrat
La Verne	Betty E. Haynes
Jim	Don Darcy
Jim's Wife	Sally Gabler
Howard Stickney	Bruce MacFarlane

NEW YORK POST
October 3, 1944

'The Odds on Mrs. Oakley' Disqualified at the Cort

By WILELLA WALDORF

FROM the moment somebody said "Don't you believe in reciprocity?" and the bartender replied "What race is he in?" it was evident last night's audience at the Cort Theatre was in for an unusually dismal farce about horse racing. The title is "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley." It is probable the plot evolved by the author, Harry Segall, sounded convulsing as originally outlined, but it's a deadly thing on the stage in 48th Street.

The producer, Robert Reud, is an Astrology expert. The stars guide his activities. They've done pretty well for him so far, since he is co-producer of "The Two Mrs. Carrolls," a Broadway success now in its second season, and sole producer of "Ramshackle Inn," a miserable little melodrama still going on the

road somewhere under the benign auspices of all the major planets.

Spurred on by so much celestial favoritism, Mr. Reud has apparently plunged headlong into "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley" without properly consulting his charts.

Custody of Fanny

Mr. Segall's plot concerns Mr. and Mrs. Oakley, who decide to get a divorce after a year of marriage. Dividing up their property, they can't decide what to do with Fanny, a temperamental race horse won in a raffle, so she goes to Mrs. Oakley for three months, to Mr. Oakley for three more, then back to Mrs. Oakley, and so on and on.

It develops after a while that Fanny is a minx. She wins all her races while in the custody of Mrs. Oakley but comes in last or refuses to run when Mr. Oakley is in charge.

This leads to a number of trumped up complications, especially when the Oakleys decide to remarry. In the next to last scene there is the usual horse-race-over-the-radio, with the Oakleys praying for Fanny to lose and make Mr. Oakley a self-respecting man again. But, alas! Mrs. Oakley has gambled her honor on the result.

What the company does in plays like this can hardly be termed acting. A few random impressions: John Archer, a newcomer, indicated that he might be a personable enough leading man under less trying circumstances. Hildegarde Halliday has a droll way of getting off vapid lines, making them sound almost funny. And Joy Hodges, when cornered, has a bad habit of screwing up her nose and gurgling like Gertrude Lawrence.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 3, 1944

Odds on Mrs. Oakley and Reud's Horoscope

By BURTON RASCOE

ROBERT Reud had better get a new astrologer. His old one is beginning to slip.

Certainly the chart man failed to call the turn on The Odds on Mrs. Oakley, which Mr. Reud presented at the Cort last night; for that is a floppo unless I am badly mistaken.

You see, Mr. Reud is a young new producer, who has announced he selects, casts, rehearses and presents plays according to horoscopic charts; that he will delay bringing a play to Broadway for weeks, even months, to secure the proper conjunction of the stars and planets for its favorable reception.

Mr. Reud's first two producing ventures, The Two Mrs. Carrolls and Ramshackle Inn were such conspicuous successes I hear half the producers on Broadway have become addicts of the astral hocus-pocus, because Mr. Reud attributed the successes of these plays not to authors or to Elisabeth Bergner or ZaSu Pitts but to the fact that he is a firm believer in horoscopes.

Up Came Saturn

My own astrologer tells me that although the sun was in Libra yesterday, Saturn, an unpleasant planet, was making its presence felt. Certainly that planet (or something) put a depressing saturnine crimp in the proceedings at the Cort last night. When you put on a farce and nobody laughs at any time during the evening except half a dozen persons whose risibilities are so responsive they probably get a big laugh out of a window full of surgical instruments, there is something wrong somewhere.

I'd say the author was at fault, but Mr. Reud may prefer to blame it on his astrologer. At any rate The Odds on Mrs. Oakley is a feeble and fumbling attempt to write another Three Men on a Horse. It is rather pathetic, particularly when you get to that scene where they (and the audience) are getting the reports on a horse race over the radio. That's always supposed to be exciting in a play; but it has been done so often that playgoers begin to squirm in their seats when they see it coming.

Last night (probably because the planet Saturn was getting in its dirty licks) the voice of the sports reporter, which was supposed to be heard over the radio, was quite plainly not coming from the radio at all but from someone behind the scenes at least 20 feet away from the radio. And the poor players, Joy Hodges, John Archer and Betty E. Haynes, were trying so hard to get the audience excited, too. It was a shame. And Miss Hodges is so pretty and has so many chic changes of costume, and Mr. Archer is such an attractive juvenile, and Miss Haynes is so personable a comedienne. It is too bad but the play never came to life.

Plot of Play

Oliver and Susan Oakley are being divorced when the play opens. He is a newspaperman, and Susan doesn't like his hours or his lack of a sense of responsibility. They jointly own a racehorse they won in a raffle. Having no children they agree that each shall alternately have the custody of the horse for three months. Susan's dad is a race track bum who gets the notion that the horse, Fanny, doesn't like Oliver and can be counted on to win every race she is in while she is in Susan's custody.

Racetrack gamblers are a gullible and superstitious lot, so pretty soon there is a syndicate formed on The Professor's theory that Fanny always wins while running for Susan and loses while running for Oliver, and so the object of the syndicate is to keep Oliver and Susan (who show signs of remarrying) apart and the object of the author is to reunite the love birds. There is a subsidiary superstition on the part of the gamblers that the reason the horse wins is because Susan is pure, though divorced; and for a minute or so in the next to the last scene, it looked as though some sparkle of wit and invention would show up in the play involving Susan's chastity. . . . Nothing came of it, however, except the display of another stunning new gown by Miss Hodges . . . Mr. Reud's astrologer must have got things mixed up.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 3, 1944

Morning Glory

By LEWIS NICHOLS

TO compound a warning: "Don't bet on the races and don't write plays about them—unless, of course, it is 'Three Men on a Horse'." Harry Segall has tried his hand, with "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley," and this morning after the night before at the Cort he must be wandering around without his shirt. To say that Broadway's newest comedy about the sport of kings—and Broadway—is finishing out of the money is perhaps to understate the case; it seemed last night to be still at the post, headed the wrong way. Horse races are better than this, so luckily are most plays.

Mr. Segall's tale is of a young couple who are divorcing and, dividing their property, assume alternate three months' custody of a race horse they received in a raffle. The horse wins for the wife, loses for the husband; a curious syndicate gets involved, and so does another horse owner bent on both racing and seduction. Since the heart of Mr. Segall and that of the horse named Fanny are in the right place, everything is straightened out in time for sportsmanship to beat out seduction (photo finish) and the audience to leave (galloping). Joy Hodges is the young wife, and either through direction or whatever at times plays it as though she were in Miss de Mille's "Rodeo"; John Archer, a newcomer from the Coast, is the husband. Frederic Fox's settings are nice, but the goings-on within are talky, cumbersome, silly and dull. Next race.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 3, 1944

Slow Track

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE is some plain and fancy betting on the ponies in "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley," but no one wins on either side of the footlights. The new farce which is cluttering up the stage of the Cort Theater is untidy and unrewarding. With a leer and a lurch it contrives a situation in which a young matron wagers "her all" on a temperamental nag and is confronted with the loser's payoff. Go to the track rather than the Cort if you want to have some fun for your money.

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For very little amusement is generated in this Harry Segall contemplation of race horses and fair ladies. He builds from scene to scene by a sort of dramatic osmosis, with no trace of wit or plot manipulation to make clear why he thought he was composing a play. At the end of six silly scenes the whole business dissolves into the same condition as a lump of sugar poised too long on a cup of coffee. Call it a sticky mess, for short. Since there is little in the acting to redeem the writing, chalk up another dismal first night for the season.

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If there is an inherent comic idea in "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley," which I doubt, it has to do with the joint ownership of a spotty mare called Fanny. An estranged couple divides the custody of the horse, but she will only run in the money when the ex-wife enters her in a race. The hilarity which this idea leads to can easily be imagined. Even when it involves the raucous machinations of a betting syndicate which capitalizes on the nag's fondness for its mistress, or has the mistress doing a strip-tease act, the show is devastatingly dull.

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Joy Hodges has the awkward role of the matron who wants to remarry her ex-husband. She plays in a manner which can only be described as a caricature of Bette Davis's performing at its worst. John Archer is somewhat better as her luckless mate, but Allen Kearns, Bruce MacFarlane and the others rarely jounce the piece into a semblance of merriment. The odds may be on Mrs. Oakley, but it would not take a pari-mutuel machine to run them away down on the Cort Theater offering.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 3, 1944

An Off-Stage Race Horse Can't Win for 'Odds on Mrs. Oakley'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

THE play which appeared last night at the Cort Theatre has had a number of titles, including "Fanny," "Our Fanny" and, finally, "The Odds on Mrs. Oakley." It could also have been called "How to Grow Old With a Horse." As the scenes changed it was always a year later, or three months later, or ten days later, and I aged rapidly. But not rapidly enough. At 9:45 P. M. I wished I were an hour older.

"The Odds on Mrs. Oakley" is about race-track betting, and if John Cecil Holm hadn't written the hilarious "Three Men on a Horse" it would be safe to lay down a rule that no bet is interesting except the one you have made yourself with your own money. There is no suspense in wondering which of two other guys is going to win a wager.

Fanny Is Prejudiced

The Oiwin of "Three Men," a vague little greeting-card poet, now has become an equally vague professor who has evolved a theory about a horse named Fanny. Custody of Fanny is shared by Susan and Oliver Oakley, recently divorced but still in love. When Fanny spends three months with Susan, she wins every race, and when she spends the next three with Oliver she loses every race. The prof has doped it out that the horse doesn't like Oliver.

It takes 18 months and 24 days for the horse to get Susan and Oliver together again—and, to appropriate one of Clarence Budington Kelland's good lines, it only seems longer. The interim is occupied by turf-club small-talk, betting syndicates, drinking (Oliver is a newspaperman) and such lines as "An inner insistent voice suddenly warns me to remain cold sober."

Joy Hodges is handsome and arch as Susan; John Archer is a little like Glenn